

# Table of Contents

The situation of left communism today . . . . .	1
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# The situation of left communism today

By Loren Goldner / SaNoShin

In-depth to say the least (it's 55 pages if you print it out) interview with marxist writer/activist and recent Mute collaborator Loren Goldner by the South Korean SaNoShin group, covering the 20th century history of class struggle and present developments/future prospects.

From Goldner's Break Their Haughty Power website (<http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/>)

The Situation of Left Communism Today:

Interview with the Korean Socialist Workers Newspaper Group (SaNoShin), November-December 2007

Loren Goldner

Preface: The following interview was conducted on three separate occasions in Seoul, South Korea, in November-December 2007 with militants of a small Korean Marxist group, SaNoShin, which is becoming increasingly influenced by left communist theory. It was the third in a series of surveys undertaken by SaNoShin, following similar dialogues with the International Communist Current (ICC) and Internationalist Perspectives (IP). The latter two groups in the past few years have, like myself, been involved in introducing left communist theory to South Korea, where it was previously all but unknown.

This context of a discussion of left communism in the world today and the quite recent interest in it in South Korea itself explains, I hope, the unusual space given to what are currents and milieus numbering, in all probability, mere hundreds of individuals, in contrast to the much larger and better-implanted far-left groups such as the three main French Trotskyist groups (LO, LCR and the Parti des Travailleurs) or the British SWP.

The wide-ranging quality of the questions raised and the answers given adds up, I think, to a rather coherent political statement and judgement about the world conjuncture of the past 40 years. I hope it will stimulate further discussion and questioning of the threadbare, received ideas of the international left as we move into the deepest financial crisis in capitalist history since 1929.

Loren Goldner  
Seoul, South Korea  
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The First Meeting

SaNoShin : What was your purpose to in coming to Korea and what is your impression of the Korean working-class movement?

LG : I first came to Korea in 1997. That was when I came here because of the general strike of January '97 against the anti-labor casualization law which the Korean parliament passed on Christmas '96. I was very impressed by that strike. I followed the Korean workers' struggle in the late 1980's, but I didn't know very much about it. So, in September 1997, I was here just before the IMF crisis. And at that time I met a number of militants, so my interest increased, and in 2005 I got my job here. It was the opportunity to really discover and learn about the Korean working class.

I think that the Korean working class is generally in retreat and on the defensive like the working class just about everywhere else. I have met many people, militants and activists, and intellectuals who had been involved in the movement earlier, and my basic impression is that the biggest immediate problem is the separation of the regular highly paid workers, a very relatively small minority, and the very large number of casual workers. So for example, the Kia casual workers' wildcat strike was physically attacked by the regular workers. That's my main impression.

SaNoShin : I heard from Comrade Oh that you aimed at connection between Korean and other international revolutionary tendencies. Explain it in detail.

LG: I came here with the idea of building bridges between the movements here and the movements in North America and Europe. I've spent a lot of time in Europe and know a lot of people, broadly speaking, in the left communist, libertarian communist milieu as well as a little bit in Brazil and Argentina and I thought that the communication between those movements and the movements here, as far as I know, was not very good. Not much is known about the real situation of the Korean workers' movement because most of what appears in English and other Western languages is in my opinion propaganda of the KCTU presenting a very narrow trade unionist and bureaucratic perspective on the movement. And this is helped by Western academics who come here and they get their information and their view from the same sources.

I've encountered several problems in this project; first of all, my very limited ability in Korean is a very serious obstacle to talking to broad numbers of militants, I'm trying to overcome that by learning Korean but it's a long way to go. And the currents in North America and Europe that I want to be in touch with and build bridges to are also quite small and their real significance only emerges in very spectacular kinds of situations of struggle when a working class struggle starts to go beyond the trade union form. So at the moment the question is to build the bridges to what and with whom.

SaNoShin: Why do you consider yourself as left communist and what are the factors that led you to left communist tendency. What is the principle of left communism?

LG: I think I would probably come pretty close to calling myself a Luxemburgist as well. But there are important differences between left communism and Luxemburgism, so I stick with left communism. My political education came in the 1960's movement in the United States and to a lesser extent in western Europe.

In those movements, when I refer to that, I'm referring to the whole strike wave in the US from 1966 to 1973, to the May-June general strike in France 1968, the Italian struggles from 1969 to 1977, the Spanish working class upsurge at the time of the mid- 1970's end of the dictatorship. Similarly, in Portugal, a dual power situation arose at that time. Those are the struggles from which I got my political education.

In those struggles almost without exception the working class went beyond trade union forms. And similarly the classical so-called worker's parties, the Social Democrats and the Stalinists, played an almost entirely conservative when not an openly reactionary role.

I began actually political activism in, broadly speaking, a Trotskyist group. It was the American branch of International Socialists who were affiliated at that time with Tony Cliff's International Socialists in Britain. They of course were not classical Trotskyists in that they considered the Soviet Union and all Stalinist states to be class societies. It was not yet the International Socialist tendency - it was much more open than what it became later. Before 1970 they were called the Independent Socialist Clubs. In the 1970's, they became the International Socialists, and began a closer affiliation with the British IS (now SWP-Socialist Workers Party).

They were different from the Trotskyists because they did have a different point of view towards the Stalinist bloc. And there were different theories of class nature of the Stalinist societies, but there was total agreement that they were class societies and not workers' states as Trotskyists called them. Some people thought it was capitalism, others people had the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, which is a class society but not capitalism.

At that time, the majority had the bureaucratic collectivist view, including me, while the minority, including Tony Cliff, said it was state capitalism, but the strategical and tactical implications were the same, for either analysts.

Nevertheless these groups, I think, at that time were rather exceptional in the international Western left. And they were a small minority position that viewed the Eastern bloc, the Stalinist bloc as a class society. At the same time, virtually all other positions of this group were Trotskyist viewpoints, on questions like trade unions, considering the Social Democrats and Stalinists "worker's parties", support for national liberation struggles, and critical support for nationalism. In another words what changed when these groups emerged from Trotskyism? What changed was the analysis of the Eastern bloc but nothing else, So that was my starting point.

Starting from 1969, I was skeptical about the classical Trotskyist core of the theory of the IS tendency, and it seemed to me that many of the struggles, the wildcat strikes which developed in the US as well as in Britain and France, especially the French May-June general strike which was a wildcat general strike, and the developments in Italy called into question the Trotskyists' analysis of unions as vehicles for advancing the working class struggle.

For to take an extreme example in Italy, in the early 1970's union bureaucrats for the major Italian unions could not even enter many factories because they would be run off by the workers. And meanwhile the Trotskyists' were saying "We have to capture the unions as vehicles for revolutionary struggle." Most Trotskyist groups, including the IS group, were going into the factories and trying to take over the union apparatus under their program.

It was at that time that I first encountered the theory of what I then used to term the "ultra left", not left communist. It's a broader concept which includes libertarian communists, Situationists, the Socialism or Barbarism group in France around Castoriadis, and the ICC which existed at that time, and many other small groups. Today we say "left communist" but at that time the term more widely used was 'ultra left'.

These currents were most powerfully developed in France under the impact of the May-June general strike in 1968 and they continued in France. LO (Lutte Ouvriere) was never "ultra-left", and of course I forgot to mention the Bordigists, whom I also discovered at this time. The Bordigists also had a presence in France that they certainly didn't have in North America or in any other countries except Italy.

So I will say that by the early 1970's, the currents that interested me most were people that we could call Neo Bordigists who, again, mainly in France, were trying to synthesize the Dutch communist left and Italian communist left.

SaNoShin : At that time, did you live in Europe?

I lived in Europe starting in 1965 mainly in France, 65, 66. I was there briefly in 68, though not unfortunately during the general strike, and in 1972. So by that time I had spent about a year there, mainly in France and Germany.

SaNoShin: Did you originally belong to the Max Shachtman Tendency?

LG: Yes. In the IS at that time, as I said, there were people who had the state capitalist analysis, while other people, the majority, maintained the bureaucratic collectivist analysis, which was Max Shachtman's theory, though not only Shachtman's, but mainly Shachtman's.

SaNoShin : At that time, were the Shachtman tendency and the IS tendency in the same organization?

LG: Shachtman had been going to the right already in 1950's, so the people who founded the American ISC were left Shachtmanites. They had broken with Shachtman because Shachtman began to support American imperialism.

SaNoShin: Anyway, tell us the story about left communist tendencies that you met.

LG: What they took from Dutch council communism was the idea of worker's councils and they were very critical toward the Bolsheviks' vanguard party theory. And what they took from the Italian Bordigists was the rejection of the united front, and the thesis on the agrarian question as fundamentally defining what capitalism is. At that time I thought that the most advanced discussion in the world was taking place in France.

Trotskyists (and also Bordigists in another way) also of course talk about workers' councils, so workers' councils were not unique in the Dutch council communist tradition but they placed a kind of emphasis on them and hostility to any vanguard party notions. That, of course, one did not find in Trotskyist groups.

The neo-Bordigists took from the Bordigists the rejection of the united front and an analysis of the centrality of the agrarian question, and different groups were trying to put these two currents together different ways. But actually what I found most interesting about them was (if you know) Herman Gorter, who was one of the main theoreticians of Dutch left communism. He brought out an "Open Letter to Lenin" in 1921 in which he emphasized the impossibility of an alliance between workers and peasants in western Europe similar to the alliance that had existed in Russia.

At the same time, the Bordigists were really somewhat super-Leninists. They in some sense were more Leninist than Lenin. But they also rejected the idea of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry. Both currents said that the bourgeois revolution had happened in the countryside and so that what happened in Russia where the peasants could ally with the workers' revolution wasn't possible in the West.

So, of course, as you know, the Dutch and Italian left communists hate each other. But in fact they said many of the same things in different language. The Dutch called the Bordigists "authoritarian Leninists" and the Bordigists called the Dutch "syndicalist". But what they both have in common is a rejection of the Russian model of revolution as a world model. I think that is what is really important about them and that is what attracted me to them.

At the same time, as I said earlier, I was interested in these theories because I was highly skeptical about the 1960s militants who were trying to capture the unions in America and western Europe. And I think 35, 40 years later, it's clear that they failed. I think it is very important to understand why they failed.

It's also important that to know that since the 1960s, and really since the 1940s in Europe and the United States, unions have played no role in any qualitative step forward of the working class. I realized that is not true, here in Korea and in a couple of the places we can talk about. But in what at

that time was the most advanced capitalist sector, unions were either not involved in the struggle or they were fighting against struggle.

What left communism is, in my opinion, in addition to what I said, just to re-emphasize it, was the one important current that rejected the universal application of the model of the Russian revolution.

The Bordigists called the Russian revolution a dual revolution, that is a revolution in which the working class basically makes the proletarian revolution with an alliance with the peasantry and defends the revolution against the white counter-revolution in an alliance with the peasantry. And then the working class element is defeated and what is left is the bourgeois revolution in the countryside, i.e. the peasants get their land. That's the Bordigists' view.

SaNoShin : What do you think about councilism?

LG: In its overall viewpoint, I don't like council communism. I think it's a kind of very one-sided view of revolution that neglects the political dimension in a revolutionary struggle. It's important to realize, however, that actually that they're not just Dutch leftists, but the German-Dutch left. Important elements in Germany were part of the same current. In the early 1920s, they were for a communist party. They just didn't want to be a Bolshevik communist party. They had their own theories later, and after about 1930 they became purists of the idea of councilism, Their early history has been kind of forgotten but basically in that pure councilist form, I think that they are just naive in their refusal of any real attention to political struggle.

SaNoShin: Is it true that there is no councilist tendency in Europe?

LG: When I refer to councilism, I'm talking about the historical contribution of councilism from before World War I to the early 1920s.

SaNoShin : What do you think about Paul Mattick?

LG: Paul Mattick Sr. or Paul Mattick Jr.?

SaNoShin: I mean Paul Mattick Sr.

LG: I think Paul Mattick Sr. was very interesting. His writings on Marxist critique of political economy, I think, are very interesting. I don't fully agree with them, but they were important, particularly in the 1960s, for the critique of Keynesianism, and the critique of monopoly capital theory, but which was very widely held in the Leninist, Trotskyist, Stalinist, and Social Democratic left. But on the other hand politically I think Paul Mattick Sr. was part of the later development of council communism that really does not pay any attention to politics.

Politically he was in the tradition of the later Dutch-German council communists. In the early 1920s, as I said. the Dutch-German council communists said they were still interested in building a communist party, not a Leninist party, whereas by 1930 they were only interested in workers' councils. And I think Paul Mattick is pretty much in that tradition.

SaNoShin : I heard that since 1960s in the US there have been some tendencies influenced by Paul Mattick. Tell us about it.

LG: I think Paul Mattick had broad influence to his writings on economics. As far as I know there was a small group called Root and Branch. In Root and Branch, Paul Mattick Sr. and Jr. were both important theorists. But as far as I know, it had influence through its journal but in the actual real struggles and movement I'm not aware of any influence that they had.

And I should also add the Paul Mattick's writings on the critique of political economy had a very large influence in Germany. For example, he wrote a critique of Herbert Marcuse, that was very good. So his influence was much broader than anything connected immediately to its groups or politics.

At the time when almost all people on the left accepted either monopoly capital theory or some kind of Keynesian Marxism or thought that questions of economic crisis were things from the 1930s, Paul Mattick was pretty unique in arguing for classical Marxist crisis theory.

SaNoShin : Was he influenced by Henryk Grossman?

LG: Yes, right, Henryk Grossman. He was an important student of Henryk Grossman. I don't agree with Henryk Grossman, so that's another reason I'm a little skeptical and much more influenced by Rosa Luxemburg's theory of capitalist crisis. But nevertheless compared to the monopoly capital theory, Keynesian Marxism, or economic illiteracy, those were the reasons Paul Mattick was very important. At that time when most people said "Economic crises aren't important", he would say "No, capitalist crisis is still with us just like in the works of Marx."

SaNoShin : Do you mean Sweezy's theory when you mention monopoly capital theory?

LG: Sweezy, Baran, Harry Magdoff, Braverman, but also others. In Western Europe there was a theory of "state monopoly capitalism", which was the theory of the communist parties. So it was the widely-held view in different forms. It went back to the monopoly capital theory of before and after World War I, the theory that influenced Lenin and which Lenin developed in writings like Imperialism. Amin, Arrighi, almost all of these people were part of general monopoly capital school.

SaNoShin : What is the broadest gap between Dutch-German Left Communist and today's Left communists? Do you think it is the party problem?

LG: I will say, yes, for the Bordigists, really nothing important happens without the party. For example, during the Spanish revolution of 1936-1937, they said "There's no revolution, because there's no party." And they actually split at that time. Some of the Bordigists went and fought in Spain, Others stayed in Europe and said "This is a battle between factions of the bourgeoisie." So there's a kind of excessive view of the importance of the party in my opinion.

SaNoShin: Today, generally, do all left communist tendencies accept the necessity of the revolutionary party?

LG: They do, and so do I. I'm talking about what the Bordigists, I mean particularly the Bordigists after Bordiga, say. (Bordiga died in 1970, and really stopped acting in the 1950s), For example, a contemporary Bordigist in Italy told me in discussion that in the 1960s and 1970s, in Italy, where there were strikes after strikes after strikes, that this was all the activity of the middle classes. And behind that thought again was this idea that if it isn't done by the party, it didn't happen, and it's not important.

SaNoShin : Last year October, the communist lefts, including the ICC, IP and you, who visited here submitted their own decadence theory. I want to know your opinion, especially related to the recent class struggles. And tell us what are your differences from other communist lefts. And explain in detail your program which was submitted in a lecture last year. What connections are there between that program and decadent capitalism?

LG: I think that in that conference there were just unfortunately physical problems, a short time for these groups to present their theory and, secondly, a certain problem of translation, so I'm not sure how effectively either group presented its theory of decadence. But I read many of the texts and I considered the ICC in particular to be very weak in critique of political economy. They have a certain kind of Luxemburgiist analysis which I don't think it is as good as Luxemburg herself. And I don't think they have really developed at all to take account of the evolution of capitalism in the last 50 years, possibly more. The ICC thinks basically that nothing new ever happens. And they consider people who think that something new happens to be modernists and eclectic. For that reason I find what the ICC says about world economy to be pretty abstract and boring. And IP is different.

SaNoShin : We agree with you.

LG: On the other hand, IP, it's of course a much smaller group, does attempt to analyze the development of capitalism. And I too find them more serious. However my own theory of decadence is different from either one.

I agree with the ICC and IP that in around the time of World War I in 1914, capitalism reached certain point in history in which it ceased to be a progressive mode of production on a world scale. Historically we see that in the first century of capitalism's existence from the early 19th century to 1914, there was a steady development of productive forces, and a growth of the working class on a world scale. And I believe that what happened in the period, let's say the decade prior to World War I, capitalism got to stage where that kind of development could no longer happen in a peaceful evolutionary manner.

When America and Germany were catching up with and passing England as major capitalist powers, the working class was growing on a world scale, as a percentage of the active capitalist population. And from World War I until 1970s, no country succeeded in developing into an advanced capitalist power in the way the US and Germany did. Starting in the 1970's and particularly 1980s, South Korea and Taiwan did in fact evolve into effectively first world countries. And for the ICC, this can't happen, this is the era of decadence. I had a discussion with the ICC in 1982 and I said "Look at what's happening in Korea" and the ICC said "It's not happening, this is decadence, we can't believe it."

But at the same time I think the theory of decadence holds because as the Asian tigers came up, the Western capitalist countries were going into decline. So unlike prior to 1914, it was not expansion on a world scale but it was growth here and decline there.

We can consider the period from 1914 to 1945 to be just lost decades for capitalism as a system, just more or less permanent crisis, war, reaction, destruction, and so on.

The period from 1945 to the early 1970s, called the postwar boom, can be understood as a period of reconstruction from that earlier period of the 1930's crisis.

In reality, the postwar boom ended in the mid-1960s but it continued into the 1970s because of credit inflation that created the runaway inflation of the 1970s.

In the mid 1960s, there were important recessions in Japan, Europe, and the United States. And the US and the other major capitalist countries reflatd their economies with credit and extended the boom into the early 1970s. But the dynamism was gone.

Of course, the reconstruction period from 1945 to the 1960s wasn't just rebuilding capitalism as it existed before 1914, but was rebuilding on a higher level of technology, living standards, and so on.

But since the early 1970s, I would say on a world scale, the system has been in permanent crisis, trying to reestablish an equilibrium. Capitalist crisis means a plunge in production, mass unemployment, the destruction of old capital and creation of the conditions for a new expansion with a viable rate of profit. The classical economic crises happening in the 1970s and in the early part of the 21st century also happened in 1929. Marx's Capital has a description of the nature of crisis. Wiping out old competing capital that's not competitive, wiping out lots of fictitious capital, credit, and forcing prices down so that a new phase of expansion can start with a rate of profit that will make capitalists invest. That's the mechanism of crisis.

SaNoShin : I think the ICC's theory is too simple. But since 1914 capitalism has entered a down phase. I think it was too simple.

LG: The ICC lives only in its own world.

SaNoShin : They cannot explain the postwar boom. What do you think about that?

LG: I said, you know, it was not just rebuilding what existed before 1914.

In order to really answer the question, I have to use Marx's terminology which may be difficult to translate.

Capitalism is system that, as you know, is regulated by what Marx called the law of value. The law of value means that from one cycle to the next, capitalism develops productivity and it makes commodities cheaper. It makes technology cheaper, and it makes wages cheaper, but it can compensate for much cheaper wages because working class consumer goods also become cheaper.

So in the whole system, capital, variable capital gets smaller because of productivity increases. But the content can get larger because commodities become cheaper.

Let me give some examples. In the 19th century in America, England, France and Germany, the most important capitalist countries, the workers spent half of their wages on food. Then an agrarian revolution happened on a world scale, Canada, Argentina, Russia, and other countries began to produce grain very cheaply. So by the time of World War I, the working classes were spending less on food and had more wages to spend on other consumer goods.

I will say the explanation for the post-World War II boom was an increase in productivity lowering the total wage by productivity gains. But because food and other basic necessities became far cheaper, then workers could buy TVs, cars, houses, things that they could not buy before World War I. So in other words, the law of value is cheapening production but living standards up to a point, including for workers, can rise. That's the postwar boom.

But we can see 1914-1945 as a period in which capitalism was trying to do the same thing that it had done in the classic crisis of the 19th century, find a new foundation for a new expansionary phase. It couldn't happen in the old way, it couldn't happen just by a crash, a couple of years depression, and then the new expansion. There were all these institutional geopolitical elements, because Great Britain could no longer be the No.1 capitalist power but Great Britain was not going to just say "Oh, sorry, we can't be the No.1 power anymore"; they had to be pushed aside. And Germany tried to push them aside and the United States succeeded in pushing them aside. So it required thirty years of, as I said before, war and political transformation to create new conditions for capitalist accumulation of the old style.

A similar process has been happening since the early 1970s where America can no longer play the role of the system's hegemon. The United States can no longer play this role, and nobody else, no other country can really replace it, but there's a struggle for reorganization of the world system that would allow a new expansionary phase to happen. And I think, like in the 1914 to 1945 period, this cannot happen peacefully. I don't know exactly how it could happen, I'm not sure it can happen because I think the system is really decadent. But nevertheless that's the problem on a world scale today.

SaNoShin: What is the notion of decadence? Is it not the same as the ICC's?

LG: Let me just add one more thing. Different regions in the world, East Asia (Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan), Russia, India, Europe, are all unsatisfied with the current world system, and would like to reorganize it. But none of them is individually strong enough to overthrow the power of the United States. I think that's the kind of world geo-political context for the ongoing crisis.

But nevertheless this is only one level of the problem. The deeper level is that, as in 1914, there cannot be an expanded world boom, it couldn't be within a capitalist framework because I believe that capitalist law of value is no longer capable of expanding the world productive forces in the same way it did prior to 1914.

The reason for that is that socially necessary labor time of reproduction is the foundation for capitalist accumulation. That's what I mean when I say that capitalist productivity increases and makes the world workers' wage bill become a smaller part of the total, though its material content can rise.

In this system, you know, as the Communist Manifesto says, the crisis occurs because the system is too productive to be contained within capitalist social relationships.

So what it had to do from 1914 to 1945 was to destroy productive forces and most importantly, workers to recreate conditions for accumulation using capitalist exchange, The capitalist law of value, to create a new foundation in which capitalist commodity exchange at the cost of reproduction could take place within capitalist social relationships after the mass destruction. And since the early 1970s, we've seen new massive destruction trying to achieve the same thing.

SaNoShin : Similar destruction again?

LG: Yes. Let's look at the balance sheet of capitalism since the late 60s and early 70s, Latin America, massive impoverishment, deindustrialization, as in countries like Argentina. The exclusion of 20~30% population from participation of any kind in the economy. Africa has been even worse: almost a total disappearance of real investment in so-called failed states. Eastern Europe and Russia have had 15 years so-called shock therapy and a transition to private capitalism with millions of people dying, because their pensions became worthless, with the new inflation. In the ex-Soviet Central Asian Republics, the ex-Soviet republics' conditions fell sometimes to 30% of the living standard of pre-1991. In the non-oil countries of the Middle East it was not quite as systematic but there were similar kinds of marginalizations of populations. There was very distorted development in the countries with the oil revenues. Then in Asia itself, a certain kind of economic development I mentioned before, the tigers, China, but in reality in both India and China, there are one and half billion peasants who are left out of this process. I see no way to pull them into the process. And in Europe and the US, there have been extended periods of mass employment, the deindustrialization of the US, the deindustrialization of Britain, That's the balance sheet of capitalism since the early 1970s,

SaNoShin: Your theory of decadence is unlike the ICC's, it is not a notion about the periods, but it seems like it's closer to instability as era of capitalism

LG: I don't know, not exactly, I think the periods are important.

The ICC emphasizes what they call the saturation of the world market. It's a problem of market having too many goods to be sold. That's a certain part of Rosa Luxemburg's theory, but I don't think it's even the best part of her theory. So they're saying that. It's a mantra. So, I'll finish explaining my theory of decadence. Unlike prior to 1914, what it comes down to is that capitalism continues to develop productivity but it cannot translate that productivity increase into a reduction of socially necessary labor time.

In other words, capitalism has the productive ability to have much shorter working hours, and society could have a much shorter work week on a world scale. But that wouldn't work in a capitalist framework. Capitalism needs living labor and exploitation of living labor in order to be capital.

So from the middle of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century, one of the main slogans of the world working class movement was for the 8-hour-day and 40-hour-a week. And during that period and into the 1960s, capitalism was lowering the work week.

But then what happened? This tendency was reversed and now the work week is lengthening in North America and Europe, and why? Not because there isn't productive capacity around but because capital needs to exploit living labor in order to survive and profit as capital.

You will find this right in the middle of Volume III of Marx's book Capital. What did he say? Capital becomes an obstacle to itself.

Capital cannot realize, socially, the gains in productivity that it creates through competition.

It happened once from 1914 to 1945, and it's happening again since the late 1960s-early 1970s. Could there be a new boom like 1945 to 1973? Yes, but, just as the 1945-1973 boom excluded a very large part of humanity, there could be another boom but it will also marginalize populations even more than the 1945-1973 boom. That to me is what decadence is all about. But in one sense it is the inability of capitalism to socially realize the gains in productivity that it makes through technology.

Like in Brazil, for example, approximately 40% of population does not participate in money economy. In America 1% of the population is in prison. And the ICC never talks about what I just talked about. That's why they can't intelligently discuss the nature of post WWII boom or the development of capitalism in East Asia since 1970s.

SaNoShin : Do you think the decadence period started in the 1970s?

LG: I want to say WWI was the turning point.

I see it as expansion up to WWI, and then a period of destruction (1914-1945), and then a period of reconstruction on a higher level of productivity (1945-1973), then a new crisis and another period of looking for trying to reconstitute the conditions for a world accumulation boom and that's what we're in the middle of right now.

SaNoShin : What do you think of Konratiev?

LG : I don't really like his theory. I think Konratiev is very interesting but I think it's ultimately a numerology. It's very interesting because actually Konratiev theory seems to explain long waves. Certain interpretations of Konratiev do seem to correspond to the boom and bust cycles of capitalism from the 18th century to the 1970s. But it has no explanatory theory of it, there's just well, this 25 years boom, and this 25 years bust. Why, in the period of the 18th century when most people were peasants and transportation took place by horses and cattle, why should the cycle have the same length as today when transportation takes place by jets, massive ships, around the world in one day?

But nevertheless it's much more interesting than most theories of capital cycles aside from Marx.

Have I adequately explained my theory of decadence and how it's different from the ICC?

SaNoShin : I understand largely. The next question. In April, 2006, in a lecture, you explained "a hundred days program".

LG : This is an article called "Fictitious Capital and the Transition Out of Capitalism". What I was trying to do in that article, as I said at the beginning, was to present in the abstract a few radical ideas of what a successful world working class revolution would do with the world economy. In other words, I was trying to develop a heuristic model of the potential of the world working class.

Another link between that and my theory of decadence is that in the US, I think to a certain extent, Europe, and increasingly in East Asia, the decadence of the system creates distortions in the economy that make it more and more difficult for workers and ordinary people to think concretely about what a working class revolution could do.

So, for example, in the US, the most decadent country except for England, only about 15% of workforce is now involved in production.

So, of course, the United States is a parasite economy in the world economy.

It draws wealth through the international financial system from the other parts of the world, such as the East Asia, Korea, China and Japan.

Which allows it to deindustrialize and have a so-called service economy.

But that service economy is totally dependent on the world continuing to accept the dollar standard and to finance America's ever-increasing debt pyramid.

Basically the rest of the world produces and America consumes. And they are able to do that because the rest of the world loans America huge amounts of money. Now this arrangement works both ways. Because the rest of the world can have apparently dynamic economic development like in China and so they need the US markets to continue to expand. The US can have this parasite role and they get their consumer goods and they don't have to produce anything in exchange.

So therefore when you present a program for a working-class revolution in a really a decadent economy such as America, people wonder what it can mean. In the 1960s and 1970s when America was still a major industrial power, it was much easier to see what it would mean, with the creation of workers councils and soviets. Here are the factories, we take them over, run up the red flag, and that's the revolution.

But now most of the factories are closed and people who used to work in the factories now deliver pizzas and work for Macdonalds or they work selling houses in the real estate markets, and so on.

So, of course, on a world scale, there is still adequate production to have transition to communism but in countries like America, the UK, increasingly Western Europe, and, I think probably, to some extent, Japan and now Korea, it's necessary to push aside the appearances of everyday capitalist production and present a program for what an actual working class revolution would do with economy.

As I said in that article, we don't want workers councils and soviets in banks and insurance companies and real estate companies and other parasitic parts of the economy, we want to abolish them.

And we want to take all the labor power, all the workers trapped in those parasitic parts of the economy and use them to help make the work week much shorter and to generally establish high productivity and high material living standards without all these parasitic obstacles to general wealth.

Take for example the American auto industry. In 1973 there were 750,000 auto workers in the industrial Northeast of the US.

And those workers at that time were the most militant and they were the vanguard of the working class.

In the last 35 years, that workforce has been greatly reduced so that today, for example, in the UAW, there are, I think, only about 500,000 auto workers left.

As you may know, right now, Ford Motors is in deep economic trouble, GM is in deep economic trouble and so they're trying to negotiate the best possible settlement with the group of workers who are left.

Now, at the same time, there are still a lot of non-union auto plants in the US, particularly, in the southern states, and most of them are foreign-owned auto plants : Japanese, Korean, German, and French.

But those factories are built in very small towns, very isolated, where there is no tradition of working class struggles, so as far as I know, there is very little worker militancy in those factories.

What does it mean from the revolutionary point of view? It means that the even 40 years ago, the idea of continuing automobile production as it existed was not part of the revolutionary program.

The real revolutionary program would be pointing to the decadence of the huge resource loss from the whole social organization of the automobile and pointing to other kinds of transportation, other kind of cities, other uses of oil, and so on. Even 40 years ago, the revolutionary program was not more cars. It was changing the whole nature of production so that the social dependence on cars declines, and other kinds of transportation like mass transportation could replace cars, and so cities could be organized in different ways.

That is material production which isn't decadent in a social framework. And so the revolutionary program would not be workers' councils, soviets, workers' control for more cars but it would be whole different kinds of work, and whole different kinds of production.

This is all to answer the question about the link between the program there and what I see as decadence of this system. It is simply a kind of abstract model attempting to cut through the appearances of decadent capitalism.

SaNoShin : We think it is a kind of reflection of deindustrialization in advanced countries.

LG: Yes, I agree. I said that I do think on a world scale, production exists that can make a transition out of capitalism into communism relatively painless. But it's important in the concentrated areas of the US and Western Europe to emphasize how different society could be organized and to emphasize also the potential that exists with, for example, the millions of people who work in these unproductive parasitic sectors. What could be done with that labor power in another society?

SaNoShin: In particular, in Western society, in America?

LG : I think Japan also has some of the same trends. Korea is going in the same direction. The new president Lee Myeong-bak, is talking about making Korea into the financial hub in East Asia and moving Korea into a service economy, so I think the same trends would happen here.

SaNoShin : It's not exceptional to Lee Myeong-bak, All bourgeois parties are arguing that.

LG: Yeah, he is the one who probably would do it if it happens.

SaNoShin : So we think some of your transitional program is a little bit artificial.

LG: I agree, it is artificial in the way that parts of volume I and volume II of Capital are artificial. It's, again, a heuristic model to point at certain kinds of problems that are not obvious, To get beyond the appearances.

SaNoShin : How can you support people working in the parasitic sectors?

LG : I think a lot of those people are quite aware of that their social roles are parasitic. And I think they would be very interested in carrying out a coherent program that talks about abolishing the ignominious work they do everyday.

I'm not saying that people who work for banks and insurance companies should not struggle because they work in parasitic sectors, I'm certainly saying that if we want to have true vision of another kind of society, the program of this kind is important to make people aware that this struggle is not to have workers' control in their bank, it's to abolish their bank.

SaNoShin : I think, many bank workers and service workers think the communist left will take away their jobs.

LG : It will take away their jobs, and it will provide them with a social framework, with other kinds of jobs among the jobs still necessary.

SaNoShin : What do you think about the nationalization of banks in orthodox Marxist theory or program? Engels argued it in the preface of the Civil War in France, Lenin also did in "The Impending Catastrophe".

LG : As a revolutionary measure in a transition, it's a necessary, it is a positive thing. But Francois Mitterand also nationalized banks when he was elected as president of France in 1981. That was just part of a state capitalist reorganization of the system. But as a weapon for transition of working class power, I think it is positive thing. But nonetheless it's necessary to recognize that if banks were nationalized in America, Britain, France, or Germany, 80~90% of the workers could be transferred to other kind of activity because that kind of banking would no longer be necessary.

I think the concept of nationalization of banks or anything else is an abstraction, separated from its specific political content. In France, with Francois Mitterand, it had one content, in Russia, 1917, it had another content, in some future revolution, it will have another content. But just like with nationalization of industry, I don't think there is anything socialist or communist about the simple idea. It's only meaningful as part of some larger process.

SaNoShin : I think nationalization gives some chances to control industries or distribute the labor force in the transitional period by soviets or workers' councils.

SaNoShin : On the question of nationalism.

LG : I guess I would put the issue of nationalism a little differently from the ICC. Nationalism was the bourgeois revolutionary ideology of the 19th century, and it was successful because it had a practical program that could be realized, namely the creation of a coherent capitalist nation state.

So Marx supported the struggle for the creation of a Polish nation in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s as something that created the conditions for the unification of the world working class. That was Marx's criteria for supporting some nationalist movements.

Marx supported Polish nationalism. He supported Irish nationalism against British imperialism but he also opposed some of the Balkan uprisings in the 1870s. Why? Because they would strengthen Russia expansionism by weakening the Ottoman Empire and he thought continual containment of Russian expansionism was more important for the world working class than the creation of the independent nations out of the Ottoman Empire.

In contrast, I think, in modern history, which is to say, after World War I, it's possible to say that a coherent nation state can't be created by bourgeois nationalism. I don't see any case in which that has been a step towards the unification of the world working class.

Let's consider some examples. The Algerian Revolution produced another kind of state capitalism, with a parasitic state bureaucracy that leans essentially on Algeria's natural gas and oil wealth, and has created a long-term deep economic crisis of marginalization for Algerian peasants. Above all, it has no way to solve the problems of serious development.

Let's consider the case of Vietnam. A national liberation movement under Stalinist leadership defeated the US and promptly made a full transition to a kind of so-called market socialism that exists there today. Can we say that the victory of Vietnamese nationalism was a step forward for the world working class? It's hard for me to imagine how that would be true.

Then we can think of more extreme examples such as the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, Angola, Mozambique, and other smaller places where for 30 years after independence, they became failed states, social disasters.

We can also think about all these nations that have been created since the late 1980s collapse of the Stalinist bloc, the new countries in Central Asia, the organization of the Eastern European countries. One could argue that those are successful creations of new bourgeois nation states. But how do they increase possibility of the unification of the world working class? I don't see any way that happened. So on that basis, I think that nationalism is still obviously a very powerful force in the world today but it has no practical program that can be in the interest of workers.

Why did Islamic fundamentalism replace Arab nationalism or other nationalisms in other Islamic countries?

Arab nationalism was part of the whole process of decolonization after World War II, the Algerian Revolution, the Egyptian Revolution, the transformation under Nasser, all these aimed at creating independent development states. They were highly bureaucratic and basically a kind of state capitalism and across the board they failed to solve the real social problems of those countries. I do not consider myself a Trotskyist but I think Trotsky was quite right in his theory of permanent revolution, that in the modern epoch the bourgeoisie can't solve social problems in the way that it did in the 19th century. It necessarily creates weak states that are unstable and totally vulnerable to the capitalist world market. So from the 1940s to the 1970s these national states seemed to have some kind of dynamic but in reality there was just one failure after another and so as their failure became obvious, Islamic fundamentalism moved into the vacuum.

The ICC may be right that sooner or later even the smallest independent nation state has imperialist appetites but I don't think that it's really the true, fundamental problem of nationalism. The fundamental problem is this inability to solve the broader problems of society in the progressive way as the bourgeoisie was doing prior to World War I.

I'm aware that in a country like Korea, nationalism remains a very powerful ideology and I think I understand some of the reason for that. Nevertheless as in the other cases I mentioned, I can't think of a practical program through which the working class can participate in the kind of national movement in the way of that Polish working class in Marx's time was nationalist. So in other words, one can acknowledge the imperialist past that produces that kind of hurt that nationalism grows from without recognizing any valid program to for a true nationalist movement.

SaNoShin : The bourgeois characteristics are very obvious in nationalism but we think it is important for working class to support the small nations' movement and their struggles. Don't you think that it will help the working class to overcome unionism or nationalism in advanced countries? For example Marx argued that English workers should support the Irish movement to overcome English nationalism or British imperialism. Is it useful in the current days?

LG : I think that of course, in the advanced countries, the US, the Western Europe, Japan and South Korea, workers should oppose their own bourgeoisie and should oppose what their own bourgeoisie is doing internationally. So to that extent, when American imperialism is oppressing, for example, Latin America, American workers should oppose that. The question, I think, becomes delicate when it's question of supporting actually giving political support to the nationalist movements that oppose US imperialism.

I don't think we can ask this question abstractly, I think we have to ask it in the same way that Marx supported Irish and Polish nationalism and opposed Balkan nationalism. The real criteria are what advances the unity of the working class on a world scale.

In today's context, as we were discussing earlier, there's a decline of American imperialist power and there's a multicentric movement in many parts of the world to try to establish alternative independent power. I think that the nationalistic movements that I'm aware of can only be part of that new reorganization of capitalist power. And therefore I again do not see them as playing any progressive role in unifying the world working class.

SaNoShin : In France, the IS and LCR supported the Muslim wearing of the hijab but LO was against that, what do you think about that?

LG : I have to say that I see that from an American point of view, namely I don't think the clothes that people wear to school are very important. People wear religious clothes or don't wear religious clothes. I don't think it matters. But in the French context, it seems to matter a lot more because of the specific nature of the French republican ideology.

In France the republican ideology of the central French state sees the education system as a system of educating French citizens. And educating French citizens, you know, as completely secular and non-religious.

So in that context, many people including LO, are hostile to Islamic clothes in school and other religious expressions in school because they see it as dissolving the division between religion and state.

Because I do not see the French Republic as creating further conditions of progress socially I am not concerned about the decline of its ideological power. But I recognize that this is a difficult question and I could be wrong, but I guess I would agree with the people who think that wearing the veil, if it is truly voluntary, is OK. That's of course another question if it is really voluntary.

SaNoShin : What about real independence movements like the Chechen or the Uighurs?

LG : I should say that many of these movements have very legitimate demands for cultural, linguistic, and other kinds of autonomy. For example the Basques in Spain have been fighting against the central state of Spain for long time. I think that it's perfectly possible to agree that Basque language could be a public language, the language of education, and a lot of other basic rights of autonomy could be granted in a capitalist framework.

And I think the same thing is true, though I know relatively little about it, for the Uighur population in China or the Chechen. I think that those movements are expression of the extreme centralism of the state and that revolutionaries could support the cultural and linguistic demands of the movements of that kind without supporting their struggle for an independent state, which I think again like in these other cases, would wind up being reactionary where the Algerian, or Angolan, or other new states quickly became reactionary.

I don't think it's true that the US doesn't like the Uighur agitation in western China. I don't think it's completely true that there have been no ties between that movement and Chechens, and other Islamic movements in the around the world. Western power and primarily Saudi Arabia have given lots of money to those movements and made it possible for them to acquire arms. In the case of the Chechens or the Uighurs, I think the US views those kinds of movements not as something they want to support but as something they can use at certain times to prod the power of China or Russia.

## The Second Meeting

### Interview with Loren Goldner

SaNoShin: There are some different viewpoints among socialists about the Kronstadt revolt, whether it was inevitable or not. Some people also say that the Kronstadt insurgents were connected with the White Guards. And that they were not the same sailors and workers who had been in the forefront of the 1917 revolution but the draftees from peasants. So was it an inevitable arrangement to survive? What's your opinion?

LG: First of all, I assume that you're not asking me this question because of what Jeong Seong Jin and Da Ham Gae say about it. They're willing to support Juchejuija, (the pro-North Korean faction in the Korean left, the so-called National Liberation or NL faction) in the KDLP, so I think they would support just about anything. But the question is obviously very important because so many different people today who think of themselves as revolutionaries have opposing positions about Kronstadt. So you use the term, which I guess Jeong Seong Jin used, that it was a necessary tragedy. And it's not easy to answer the question posed with those words but I will try. First of all, have you read Paul Avrich's book called "Kronstadt 1921"?

SaNoShin: No, it's not translated.

LG: Okay, Paul Avrich is a very interesting historian of the Russian Revolution. He is an anarchist and he does say that the Bolsheviks were justified in crushing the revolt. According to Paul Avrich, and according to other accounts of Kronstadt which I've read, when the revolt took place, the Bolsheviks in Petrograd sent a delegation to meet with the Kronstadt soviet. And the Kronstadt soviet, initially was quite open to a discussion with the party comrades. I don't remember the name of the most prominent Bolshevik spokesman in that situation, he was not a top level leader but an important leader from Petrograd. His arrogance and his way of talking to the Kronstadt soviet deeply alienated the people who had been willing to talk. I think it's also highly significant that the Kronstadt insurrection arrested the communist officials on the island of Kronstadt and put them in prison with the attitude of 'we'll deal with them later'. Whereas when the Bolsheviks conquered the island they shot everybody. So again I think the fact of jailing, not executing the communist officials was another sign of good will on the part of the Kronstadt insurrection. After 1991 a report from a Cheka officer was found in the Soviet archives that was written one week after the insurrection broke out, in which he said, "this is not a White insurrection, we have to deal with this revolt". Now, some people who support the Bolshevik crushing of Kronstadt say "Okay, well yes, it was one week after the insurrection started, he had not yet had time to find out about White influence on the insurrection." And this report was absolutely top secret and only read by Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and a few other very high Bolshevik officials. But nevertheless the party press and all public statements of the Bolshevik regime were saying "This is a White insurrection, this is a counter revolution, we have to crush this." As you probably know, Zinoviev at that time was the head of the Petrograd soviet, and he became absolutely hysterical and really was paralyzed by the revolt. As you also know, Zinoviev was generally a rather hysterical person as he showed in the fall of 1917 opposing the Bolshevik insurrection and on other occasions. Trotsky was not in Petrograd at that time but was firing one telegram after another to

Petrograd saying "We have to pin this on the Whites". Now of course, as you also know, strikes in the factories in Petrograd had just ended shortly before the insurrection. And Alexander Berkman, who was a libertarian communist, who was in Petrograd at that time, reports being in meetings of the soviets in factory committees, and when Cheka officials would come into the room, workers would begin to tremble. That of course, is just an anecdote, but I think it's already clear from things that were written long ago and also more recently based on new archived material (for example by Professor Lyu Han Su), that by 1921 the relationship between the party and the workers' councils and soviets was almost entirely severed, that they still existed but they existed as rubber stamps of the party. So as a first answer to the question here, yes, I would say that by 1921, the Bolshevik party and the democratic institutions of workers' power-soviets and workers' councils-were completely separated. Trotsky and many other people have said that the Kronstadt insurgents were not the same sailors and workers of 1917, and frankly, I don't know, but I don't believe what Trotsky says anymore than I believe particularly what the anarchists and libertarian communists say. Particularly because of the lies and propaganda that came out in the Bolshevik press during the insurrection. Another fact that you may not know is that many units of the Red Army in Petrograd refused to attack Kronstadt and the Bolsheviks had to bring these Kursantis, which were very young officers from military academies in other parts of the country to be the main military force. And when the attack took place across the ice there were people in the rear who were shooting anybody who tried to retreat. This had been a normal practice during the entire civil war so there's nothing unusual about this but I'm just citing the fact of the refusal of many Red Army regiments to join the attack and the necessity of having those kinds of measures against possible deserters as further evidence that the revolt was quite popular or at least seen in a very ambivalent way by many people, including people in the Communist Party and in the Red Army. Finally the very fact that at the party congress about one or two weeks later, the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, Lenin said, "Kronstadt lit up the horizon like nothing else." It was at that congress that the Workers' Opposition was defeated but during the discussion at the congress Lenin said "The Russian working class has disappeared." All of the workers from 1917 were killed in the civil war or had gone back to the farm to survive. So one of the Workers' Opposition delegates, Shliapnikov, jumped to his feet and said, "So you are exercising dictatorship in a name of a class that no longer exists." On the other side of the debate, I would say several things. First of all, after four years of world war and three years of civil war, there was an obvious, total exhaustion in Russia. The Allied blockade was still in effect, the Whites were active in Finland, there were British and French military and intelligence people in Finland, who obviously would be interested in a revolt like this, and as you know the Kronstadt insurrection was reported in French newspapers a week before it actually happened. Nevertheless, whatever the case, I have never seen any convincing evidence that the insurrection can be characterized as a White insurrection. I recall that there was a general who wound up as the commander of the Kronstadt forces and there is no question about his credentials on the side of the revolution, he had fought on the Red side during the civil war. So there was no way that they could say with any credibility that he was a White element. Another one very factual element about it is, if this was a White plot, all they had to do was wait one week and the ice was going to melt and the island would become impregnable until the following winter. So getting back to the question of 'necessary tragedy', to me it's perfectly comprehensible that in that situation-after seven years of war and all the destruction-that the Bolsheviks would be paranoid about a White rebellion. But when we say 'necessary tragedy', we have to be very careful. I think that one fundamental aspect of the degeneration of the Russian revolution was a split between the high level leadership-the Lenins, the Trotskys and so on who had lived many years in exile-and the internal party apparatus which had developed in the underground for 20 years. These were people like Stalin who had been robbing banks, escaping from prison and generally leading a very interesting but totally underground existence for a long time. I believe these people became the core of the Bolshevik apparatus, as it existed for ordinary workers and peasants, from 1917 onward. Unlike Lenin and Trotsky, these were not people who stayed up late at night worrying about the relationship between party and class. During the civil

war more and more elements, basically right out of the criminal underground, were recruited into the apparatus of the Cheka and other organs of Bolshevik power. So I would say there was Stalinism before Stalin that was already present as one aspect of the overall Bolshevik party. Victor Serge tells in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* a very revealing story along these lines. In 1920 there were some hundreds of anarchist political prisoners who were condemned to death and Lenin and Trotsky announced an amnesty for them. So the amnesty was going into effect on the following day and Pravda was publishing the names of all amnestied anarchists. And during the night before the amnesty took effect, the Cheka shot all of these anarchists. So Victor Serge went to the prison and asked the officer why he had shot them when the amnesty was taking effect and the Cheka officer replied, "Lenin and Trotsky can be as sentimental as they want, my job is to destroy the counter revolution." I think this points to this division, already in these years between a very tough apparatus that by 1921 had already in part been recruited from the criminal underground because these people had a lot of experience, and the intellectual Marxist leadership with different theoretical ideas who were in power. But at the same time I think that there was a kind of party patriotism in the official ideology of Lenin and Trotsky that protected that kind of activity. Party patriotism was the ideological cover for these essentially gangster activities. As you probably know, in 1921, Lenin and Dzerzhinsky--Dzerzhinsky was the head of the Cheka--and he and Lenin conducted a private study, a private commission of inquiry about the activities of the Cheka in these kinds of events and they were horrified. But in the situation of 1921, they decided there was nothing they could really do about it. Let's not forget that from 1918 onward, the Bolsheviks had been imprisoning people from every other left group and in many cases they also were shot. Mensheviks, social revolutionaries, left social revolutionaries, and anarchists. Of course civil wars are not happy occasions, and things happen in civil wars, but I think that overall the crushing of all opposition outside the party also deeply weakened the dictatorship at the end of the civil war. And what that shows again essentially is this ideology of party patriotism and 'we are the revolution, and if you are against us, you're a counter revolutionary'. So to finally answer the overall question I would say that yes, by 1921 the working class had become a passive observer of what was going on at the top level of the party. And to talk about that as a workers' state was the wrong characterization. Are you familiar with the American radical Max Eastman?

SaNoShin: Yes, I know him.

LG: Okay, Max Eastman was in Russia from 1922 to 1924, and he actually spoke fluent Russian, and he got to know all-Lenin, Trotsky and many other top level Bolshevik officials--he was working on a biography of Trotsky and he attended both the 1922 and 1924 congresses of the Comintern and he describes that how the top level intellectual leadership of the Bolshevik party were truly frightened by the kinds of people that Stalin had brought into the apparatus that were Stalin's base. If they were frightened, just imagine what the ordinary workers and peasants felt. Max Eastman didn't think there was any mystery about Stalin's victory from 1924 onward. So, was it a necessary tragedy? I would say the tragedy was the survival in terrible conditions of this first self-designated Marxist political party in a situation where it could not carry forward any important aspect of a Marxist program. In their own minds, they realized by 1921 that the German revolution was not going to happen, so they imagined that they were sort of holding this remote outpost of world revolution until the next wave and very quickly their position at the head of a nation state in a world of nation states, forced them towards what Stalin called 'socialism in one country', very quickly they were forced to act like a nation state. They signed a commercial treaty with Britain, they implemented a new economic policy to cool out the situation within Russia and other developments like that, which were accommodations to this horrible situation. As one last footnote to what I'm saying, have you ever read the book of the Yugoslav Trotskyist, later ex-Trotskyist Anton Ciliga called *The Russian Enigma*?

SaNoShin: No.

LG: Okay, I highly recommend it. Ciliga later became something of a reactionary but I don't think that undermines the power of what he shows in that book. He was a Trotskyist, he became a Trotskyist in Russia. He was a Yugoslav delegate living in Russia in the twenties, became a Trotskyist in 1926 and

was sent to Siberia in 1930. In Siberia he found himself in a concentration camp with all the surviving Mensheviks, left social revolutionaries, anarchists and other left political prisoners. Of course all of these people were later shot but Ciliga was saved by his foreign nationality and returned to Europe and was able to write his book. In the years he was there, probably the most sophisticated debate about the defeat of the Russian revolution ever took place. And what is truly remarkable about what he reports is that the Trotskyists who were there were treating the other political tendencies just as arrogantly as they had been when they were in control of the state. And they were completely focused on the debates going on in the top level of the party and they seriously expected to be recalled to Moscow any day to resume state power. That's where the Trotskyists were psychologically at a time when they had already been totally defeated-arrogant towards the left opposition and focused on the summit of the political party with no relationship to the broader working class and Soviet society. To finally answer the question that's why I disagree with Jeong Seong Jin and his characterization of the Kronstadt. Do you want to ask any further questions?

SaNoShin: So do you think it was understandable but not inevitable?

LG: Given the circumstances, given the way the Bolshevik party had evolved, given the terrible conditions of 1921, and above all the failure of revolution in the west, there is some deep inevitability about it. When western communists visited Russia during the civil war and after, they were often quite surprised at how out of touch Lenin was with the situation in western Europe. Some German communists came to talk to him in 1921 and they sat down and Lenin pulled down a map of Germany and said, "So, comrades, where will the revolution break out first?" The German comrades looked at each other, they weren't sure what to say. But on the other hand, Lenin was hardly the only person, not just in Russia, with the same mistake. Revolutionaries in western Europe also believed that the post-World War I situation presented a revolutionary possibility. Unfortunately they were wrong. Nevertheless because the international strategy was so fundamental to the Bolshevik strategy-it was the reason they thought they could make a revolution first-when it turned out that they were wrong, yes, I would say 'inevitability' was central. Because of the widely held view of not just of the Bolsheviks but of many revolutionaries in western Europe that the revolution was at hand, that is what I would point to as the 'tragic necessity' or 'tragic inevitability' of the defeat of the Russian revolution. If you want to talk about 'inevitability', I would say that the victory, or the apparent victory of a Marxist party in a very backward country with a wrong appreciation of the world situation, that made everything else inevitable.

SaNoShin: Do you think the Bolsheviks took the power too early? Or that they shouldn't have taken power?

LG: No, I think they were right to take power. If I had been there in the fall of 1917, I would have been in favor of taking power with the understanding that Germany was the key to the situation. So I would have been wrong along with almost everybody else. I think it was wrong to systematically crush all left-wing opposition in the years of the civil war. It was this party patriotism, this belief that "we" embodied the revolution, that added this element of inevitability to what happened later.

SaNoShin: Do you think that the USSR was a workers' state when they crossed the Rubicon in 1921?

LG: No. I think to talk about a workers' state when workers exercise no power in institutions like soviets and workers' councils, is a meaningless phrase.

SaNoShin: So what is the characteristic of USSR state power after 1921?

LG: In the party debates in the 10th party congress, March 1921, Lenin replied to the Workers' Opposition who were saying this is state capitalism; he said "We would be lucky to be state capitalists. What we are is a backward capitalism of petty producers and peasants with a working class party controlling the state." Lenin ridiculed the theory of state capitalism of the Workers' Opposition and said "we would be lucky if we were state capitalists, that would be a step forward." You can find this speech in the party congress minutes. What Russia is right now is a petty producer capitalism with a pro-working class party controlling the state. The peasants had all the land in individual plots at

that point and that was the basis of the economy along with the nationalized industry which at that time was at 15% of the 1914 levels. So what did you have after 1921? You had seven years of the NEP, followed by Stalin's draconian first five year plan, collectivization and everything that happened after 1928. I think we have to apply Marxist criteria to analyzing the meaning of ideological pronouncements of political parties and individuals. So some of the Bolsheviks in 1921, I'm sure they were sincere about their belief that they were a workers' party controlling a backward capitalist state. Are you familiar with Miasnikov? Miasnikov was a theoretician in the Workers' Group, which was a smaller left opposition of 1921. Miasnikov was a worker, he had joined the Bolshevik party in 1902 or 1903, he had been in prison, he had escaped from prison three times, he had complete revolutionary credentials. So there was no way the Bolsheviks could put him in prison. And so he and Lenin had discussions in which Miasnikov said, "Okay, I understand the ban on bourgeois political parties, but why don't you allow the return to democracy for all working class political tendencies?" They argued and Lenin said that it was impossible, and Miasnikov accepted being sent into exile. Do you know Philippe Bourrinet? Bourrinet is a former ICC historian who has written three or four excellent books, one on German-Dutch council communism, two books about Bordiga and the Bordigists and some other things, and he has an incredible website ([HTTP://WWW.LEFT-DIS.NL/](http://www.left-dis.nl/)). And he has a very good article, I believe it's translated into English (he writes in French) on Miasnikov's conversations with Lenin. I really urge you to look at it. So in 1921, the Bolsheviks signed the Anglo-Russian commercial agreement, they accepted foreign investment in Russia, they signed a commercial agreement in December 1920 with the Turkish government of Kemal Pasha. Very shortly after this agreement, Kemal Pasha arrested and executed all of the leaders of the Turkish Communist Party, who by the way were possibly Luxemburgists and who had spent time in Germany, working with Rosa Luxemburg. And the Bolsheviks said nothing and they shook hands and began that relationship. In a document written by Trotsky in 1920... are you familiar with the Gilan soviet in Persia? Gilan is the northern part of Iran or Persia and a pro-soviet revolution took place there in 1920. And there was an Anglo-Persian treaty of some kind which essentially gave a free hand to the Persian government, which was backed by the British, to crush the Gilan soviet. And Trotsky wrote... This is a document that very few Trotskyists ever pay attention to, and Trotsky said, "In our policy towards the colonial world and the semi-colonial world, we have to make concessions to British imperialism and we have to discourage our comrades from pursuing a revolutionary strategy." So essentially a Menshevik point of view in the mouth of Leon Trotsky in 1920. As you also know in 1920, before the civil war ended, the Soviet government allowed the German army to train in the Ukraine. And that was in exchange for German officers helping to train Red army officers and soldiers. And then in 1922 there was the Rapallo treaty, which opened formal commercial and diplomatic relations between Soviet Russia and Germany. And this intensified the German military activities in Russia because the Allies did not want them to remilitarize. This led to high-level contacts between the military officers of the Red Army and the German army. So for example in October 1923, when Trotsky and Zinoviev were trying to oversee the last phase of the German revolution... October 1923 was the last days, the last uprising of the German revolution which took place in Hamburg. Trotsky and Zinoviev, as the leaders of the Third International, were trying to promote the German revolution in its last phase and it's a well-known fact that the Hamburg uprising was a fiasco. But the weapons that the German army used to crush the Hamburg uprising were sold to Germany by the Soviet Union. I learned that from Philippe Bourrinet, who is a remarkable historian. So what does this mean? It means that again, I don't doubt that Trotsky and Zinoviev were sincere about wanting revolution in Germany in fall 1923. But the practice of the Soviet state in all of the situations that I mentioned was moving in a completely different direction. And becoming more and more the operation of a nation state with national interests in a world dominated by nation states. So what I'm merely saying is that as Marxists, since we believe that practice is what makes consciousness, that the remaining true revolutionary internationalism of the Bolsheviks was being seriously undermined by the actual practice of the Soviet government in many different parts of the world. And once again, to call that phase a workers' state of any kind, just seems

to me to be ideology and wishful thinking.

As we know from Marx's 1840s writings, we do not judge individuals and political movements by their opinion of themselves but by their real social activity and practice.

SaNoShin: I think we should wrap it up now.

LG: Wrap up, question no. 5? Okay.

LG: I'm just curious, are the things that I mentioned in the last part about Iran, Germany and Trotsky's 1920 statement that we have to ask the comrades in the Middle East to not pursue revolutionary policy, and what I said about Turkey, had you heard these things before?

SaNoShin: No.

LG: Yeah, they're not widely known. I don't think Choi Il Bong or Jeong Seong Jin know these things either.

SaNoShin: First of all, what do you think about the trade unions, do you think they are tools of capital, like what the ICC and IP say? And the last time when ICC was here, they told us that a lot of workers and militants joining the KTCU is not a common situation internationally so they said you can't put this particular case into a general one. But we think that we have to join the trade unions in South Korea to have activities. So what do you think about it?

LG: Well, I think the ICC and IP (to a lesser extent) are victims of what I consider to be a highly abstract approach to how class struggle develops. I have known the ICC and read ICC materials for 35 years. And on one hand, I initially found it quite interesting and I subsequently met many people in the ICC and many people who are ex-ICC members, including the IP people, and in my conversations with them, I have rarely, if ever, seen an awareness of the very uneven and fragmentary development of class struggle and class consciousness. I think I told you last week that when I had discussions in Paris with the ICC in 1982, I said "Look at the economic development that's happening in South Korea", and they said "That's impossible. This is the era of capitalist decadence". Now, I should also point out that not all left communists have this attitude towards trade unions. If you consider the Bordigists part of the left communist tradition, the Bordigists are for work in trade unions. But it's certainly true that anybody who comes from the German-Dutch council communist tradition and most of the modern left communist currents in Europe and elsewhere, do reject working in unions. So I reject that kind of abstract judgement of unions, but at the same time I reject the general Trotskyist view that the unions can be captured for revolution. Therefore I think that the correct strategy and tactics involves being in unions where they exist but not being unionist. For example, I look at struggles in which people in unions attempt to link up, form alliances with people outside the unions and broaden the struggle in that way. And I think that by itself is a strategy that undermines union bureaucracy. I think it's highly significant that in all of the class struggles in the West in the 60s and 70s—from the wildcat movement in the US, Britain and France, to May 68, to the Italian movement, to the Spanish movement, 1974, 75 Portugal—in none of these cases was the expansion of unions central to what the workers were doing or demanding. In none of these struggles was the advancement of unionism an issue. The wildcat strikes, the general strike in France, the so called 'creeping May' in Italy from 1969 to 1977, in none of these strikes were workers saying "We want more unions". The unions were fighting against the workers' movement. At the same time, as I said, for example in Italy in the early 1970s, union bureaucrats could not even go into many factories because they would be run off by the workers. Now that was in the context of the post World War II boom, and it was very easy for workers to change jobs and nobody imagined a situation of major economic crisis. And I think it's also significant that since the 1970s and since the beginning of a big world economic crisis or restructuring of capitalism, no union that I'm aware of has ever gone beyond what I would call a narrow corporatist viewpoint. You know the cartoon characters who run off the cliff and are suspended in the air over a very deep canyon and look down, and as soon as they look down they fall to the ground?

SaNoShin: Yes, I think so.

LG: Yeah, the unions in the west are in that situation. The auto workers for example in the United States had 750,000 members in 1973 and today they probably have no more than a 500,000 auto workers. During that whole decline, when rank and file left opposition groups would criticize the union strategy, the union bureaucrats were saying, they had a slogan 'If it's not broken, don't fix it'. So their entire concern was to preserve the incoming of union dues long enough for them to retire. The declining numbers of members were still paying dues to the union and the bureaucrats mainly just wanted enough in their own pensions so that they could retire. That's an anecdote but I think it points to the fact that the unions after the beginning of the crisis in the 70s were not only unable to change their strategy, they continued their very narrow approach as the situation of the workers declined and declined.

SaNoShin: It's the same in Korea, now.

LG: Yes, well, the American situation is extreme, for example in the auto industry both Ford Motors and General Motors, the two biggest auto companies are in deep trouble. And just like the KCTU here, they have accepted every step of the auto company strategy to outsource and downsize the work force. On the other hand, in some developing countries, countries that emerged economically after the beginning of the 1970s crisis-and I'm thinking of South Korea, Brazil, and in a different way Spain, Portugal, and in a still different way in Poland and Iran-all of those cases, for a certain period of time, unions did play a militant role in the transition to democracy. And I say 'democracy' in quotes. And in every one of those cases, I think with the exception of Iran, the mainstream ideology of the unions was, 'We are the vanguard of the struggle for democracy, and once democracy is established, we will have strong power for worker organizations'.

SaNoShin: It's the same here.

LG: Yes, yes. I said in all of those cases except possibly Iran which I don't know that much about. So instead, as soon as the military dictatorship or the Stalinist dictatorship had been defeated, what happened was a very radical neo-liberal fragmentation of the working class and dismantling of the very industrial base that the unions had grown up in. They were the advanced guard and they were the fighting force for the transition to democracy, whatever they said they were fighting for, but once that transition was complete and the old authoritarian regimes were dismantled, a neo-liberal radical attack on the heavy industry base of the workers' movement took place and undermined the power of the unions. So in that sense, I think it does confirm a broad view, not unlike the ICC, of the current era of capitalism as being one in which lasting reformism is impossible. These developments which seem to point to a positive role for trade unionism actually, because of their very short term character, point to a kind of decadence in the capitalist system that makes any kind of long term reformism impossible for the working class.

SaNoShin: What do you exactly mean by reformism?

LG: Well, I was about to say, in prior to 1914, in Germany and the United States and in Great Britain above all, in France to a certain extent, as the working class was growing with industrialization, it was possible for unions to form and wages to rise in a lasting way, and possibly for the workers' parties to participate in elections on some occasions, and that was the basis of the kind of gradualism and revisionism that was articulated by Bernstein in Germany. That kind of practice is impossible in contemporary capitalism. I think that has been proved both in the cases of the West that I mentioned, and it has been proved in the transitions out of dictatorship-Brazil, South Korea, Poland-that I also mentioned. Nevertheless, as I said in the beginning, I do not think the revolutionary approach to the union question is simply 'unions are bourgeois, and to be involved in the unions is to be part of a bourgeois institution'. Karl Marx in 1860 also said that unions are bourgeois institutions. And nevertheless he strongly advocated socialists, Marxists, leftists of all kinds to be active in unions. Nevertheless I think history since that time has demonstrated that the strategy of taking over unions, as is still advocated by some Trotskyists, is a dead end. Already in 1914, the unions in every country participating in World War I joined their national government and helped form almost state capitalist

planning institutions in collaboration with capital. And again in World War â...j, the unions in all the countries, in all the bourgeois democracies, did the same thing, and were central in sending the working class off to fight in the imperialist war. And I think with the much weakened position of unions in the world today, there's no question that the same thing will happen again. So what is my strategy for the unions? It is to be active in unions where they exist, but not to do it with a unionist perspective but with a class wide perspective that points to all of the workers and other elements, other oppressed groups in society that have no opportunity to participate in unions and to involve them as much as possible in struggles. As what is happening to some extent right now with the E-land strike in Korea. One of my favorite examples is the Buenos Aires subway strike of 2003-2004, where the subway workers struck with the demand for '30 hours a week'. And demanding that the subway management hire 2,000 new workers to make it possible for everybody to work 30 hours a week. And they won! Now subway workers in big cities have a special kind of power that very few other workers have, but nevertheless I think the example is one of workers who are in unions doing things that point to a broader class orientation. Do you want me to say more about this?

SaNoShin: I completely agree with your tactics.

We agree that the unions are becoming more of a state institution but we also think that we have to be active in it. But most of the left communists seem to generally reject the whole idea of participating in the unions or mix it up with what the Trotskyists say, 'capture the unions'. So are there any revolutionary groups in foreign countries who have the same viewpoint as us?

LG: Well, before I get to that, let me just say another thing, in both Europe and the US, there are some Trotskyists who are now union officials at different levels, particularly in France. All three of the major Trotskyist groups have their union shop stewards and low level bureaucrats. And in America, there are in a different way, much smaller but similar kinds of developments. They tend to present this infiltration of the unions as a success for their Trotskyist program. But the reality is that these people are always elected, not because they are Trotskyist, and not because of the Trotskyist transitional program, but because they're good militants! So their political strategy is undermined by their success and their illusions about their success. I'll give a couple of more anecdotes to illustrate what I think is the abstract theoretical bankruptcy of the left communist, left communist of the ICC type. In the American South about five years ago, a chicken packing factory burned to the ground with mainly black women workers trapped inside because the management had locked all the safety exits. Thirty women were killed in that fire. And what did they do? They formed a union to force the company to leave the emergency doors unlocked while people were working. I would like to see the ICC come to a situation like that and say "No, no, , this is the era of capitalist decay, unions are reactionary." I worked for a number of years on the non-academic staff of a big American university on the east coast. I was working on the staff in the library. And there was a unionization drive, that took 15 years to finally win. A unionization drive means an attempt to form a union by the non-academic staff. The management of the university fought this unionization drive in every possible way. The union finally won in 1989, and it was considered the most successful unionization drive of white-collar workers in 20 years. The immediate result of the union victory was a 10% to 20% wage increase for the least paid non-academic workers. More important than the wage increase was that the workers were able to criticize management, talk back to management without fear of being fired as they had been in the past. Now, that's the good news. The bad news was that as soon as the union won, the university began a new strategy of slowly trying to... Do you understand salami tactics?

SaNoShin: Yes.

LG: You can't destroy something all at once so you cut off little pieces. They began a strategy of salami tactics to deeply weaken the union, mainly by reclassifying many non-academic staff members as professionals. Suddenly out of 8,000 workers who were eligible for the union within 10 years, about 4,000 of them had become managers of one kind or another, and therefore classified out of the union. And the union leadership, the same people who had organized the union, went along with this.

Another anecdote, just before the final vote that brought the union in, there was a rally of the union with politicians from the Democratic party who were all supporting the union, and this included left-wing Democrats, centrist Democrats and right-wing Democrats. The leader of the unionization drive gathered all the union organizers together and said, "Now, when they give their speeches, I want everyone to applaud all the speeches because no matter who gets elected in November, we want to have a friend in Congress". In other words, "We're just a union, we're not a political organization but we want to have a friend through the parliamentary election". So the result is that almost 20 years after the victory of the union, the union has been deeply weakened by these different kinds of strategies. But nevertheless I think it would have been totally bankrupt in 1989 to say to the workers of this university, "Don't form a union. This is the era of capitalist decay. The union is merely a tool of the capitalists". The university administration certainly did not think so and this university one of the most liberal institutions in America, they could not stop the union using violence for example, because their reputation would have suffered terribly. So it was a special situation but they hated the union and they wanted to get rid of the union by every possible way. So again I just think that these abstract formulations of the groups like the ICC do not take account of these uneven, fragmentary realities of class struggle.

I did not answer your question about whether or not there are any revolutionary groups that I'm aware of that practice the kind of perspective I'm talking about. And I have to say, thinking about it, I don't know of any in North America and if there are some in Europe, I'm not aware of them. I live in New York City when I'm not in Seoul, and I know a number of Trotskyists who are members of a very small group called the LRP, the League for the Revolutionary Party. Are you familiar with them? Walter Däum is one their theoreticians, and wrote a very good book *The rise and fall of Stalinism*. They have a state capitalist analysis of the Soviet Union and so on. And they have some very serious militants working in the subway system and also in the municipal civil service union. They, by their militant activity and interventions, have a lot of credibility with an important minority of the workers in these unions. And they are hated by the union bureaucrats, the union bureaucrats do everything to get them fired. But because they have the support of a certain minority of workers the bureaucrats can't really get rid of them. So for example, when I want to know what is happening in rank and file labor activity in New York city, I don't ask the ICC or the IP, I ask these people because they have a very concrete experience of day to day kinds of struggle. At the same time, the LRP is a classical Trotskyist organization and as far as I know, their perspective is taking over the unions if someday that ever becomes possible. So they practice the usual Trotskyist kinds of strategies and tactics. They take a statement by the bureaucrats and say "The bureaucrats say we should get a 10% wage increase, let's fight for 10%!" And as far as I know they never raise a perspective beyond the framework of the union. But for the ICC, they are the "left wing of the bourgeoisie." What can you say? Anyway, I think the important point is that the flaw, the mistake in their perspective is that in a situation where they would ever be close to having power in a union, there would be a broader movement, much bigger than the union, that they would have to address and speak to. That in my opinion is the flaw that if they would ever get close to power, the focus that is strictly on capturing the union would neglect all the people outside the union, outside the workplace who also have an interest in the struggle. Now in Europe, the situation is more complicated because there's a broader class consciousness and there has been a longer period of Trotskyist and other currents of that kind working inside of unions and most notably *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO).

But as I said earlier, when their members get elected to union posts-shop steward or low level bureaucrats-it's not as revolutionaries but it's as good union militants. So I think they have illusions about their influence because their support is not coming from the full Trotskyist transitional program but by the workers recognizing that they're good at traditional kinds of union struggle.

(Conversations during a short break)

SaNoShin: I think all revolutionaries should be militants but that's not all.

LG: Yes, right. And the problem is to combine being a good militant with something that is really pointing beyond immediate militancy, beyond trade unionism.

SaNoShin: In Korea, there have been many militant workers since 1987 but they didn't go beyond militancy or militant unionism and nowadays are just unionists. I think it's the revolutionaries' fault. The militant workers could have become revolutionaries but the majority of the revolutionaries failed to carry out the revolutionary principles with them. And degenerated themselves to mere unionists. After we finish, I would like to hear your opinion about-I know you were not here in 1987 but-what would have been a serious revolutionary strategy in that situation.

LG: That's a question that interests me a great deal.

And I just wanted to say, there's a great expression for what happens to revolutionary militants who just become ordinary militants, which is "If you quack like a duck long enough, you will grow webbed feet"

.(Interview continues)

LG: I think the case of France is very special because France has such a highly politicized society with a very long revolutionary tradition, so the success of the three major Trotskyist groups in the unions has no parallel in any other country that I know of.

-You mean three groups?

Yes, there is LO, LCR, and there's the Parti des Travailleurs-the workers' party, they're the Lambertists. In the 2002 presidential election, LO got 5% of the vote, LCR got 5% of the vote and this group got 1%.

-What is their initial?

They're called the Parti des Travailleurs-the workers' party. But Parti des Travailleurs is under an organization that calls itself the OCI, which is the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste. They're Lambertists. They're a very strange group. Are you familiar with the Healy group in Britain? Gerry Healy? They were the fraternal group of the Healyites in France. And they have actually infiltrated the highest levels of French politics in different forms, including the Freemasons. They have a real perspective of infiltration. And Jospin, when he was the prime minister, it was revealed that he was a former member of this group. So they can have influence at the top, and they know through the Freemason connection, they know the whole political class in France but their mass base is much smaller than either LO or LCR. But whenever there's a big action, like in the big civil service strikes of May-June 2003, all their union bureaucrats came out of the woodwork and were calling for a general strike. Do you understand 'come out of the woodwork'?

SaNoShin: No.

LG: Do you know what a termite is? So when you say 'come out of the woodwork', it means they've been hiding in there but in these situations they emerge, talking about general strike... so it has no meaning. To finish up on question no. 6, I wrote an article which you can find in my website about a very interesting through quite small network of extra-union militants in Paris. They're small but their organizing principle could be applied on a much larger scale. They simply have the name 'Support Committee'. They are a group of casualized workers and they see their activity as being a flying picket. Flying picket means they're not attached to one workplace but they take people because they are casualized, nobody has one job for very long, so they sort of float in the workforce and when something happens at one workplace, they can go there and make a very small strike of maybe 20 people suddenly have 300 activists.

SaNoShinL What's "extra-union"?

LG: I would describe my perspective as extra-unionism, that is be in the union, be outside the union, but your perspective is beyond the union. Extra-union means beyond the union.

SaNoShin: And their name is 'Support Committee'?

LG: Yeah, it's a very simple name. It's a small example but I think the principle has basically very wide application. They are not trying to recruit people to any permanent organization. They're trying to develop a network of people who can intervene in these situations. So for example in 2002, there was a strike of MacDonald's workers in Paris, and they brought people from all over Paris to picket MacDonald's and close it down and the strike won! 8 to 10% wage increase, a very bad supervisor was fired..., small demands of that kind. But without this broader 'Support Committee', they just would have been isolated and defeated. And they did the same thing in a couple of other situations. For example,

SaNoShinL What is their political identity?

They're a grab-bag. It includes anarchists, libertarian communists...

SaNoShin: So it's just a militant organization?

LG: Yes, they have no political perspective and I think that is a weakness, but nevertheless they have shown, they've turned casualization on its head. In other words, the capitalists thought that casualization had solved the problem of class struggle for good. The capitalists thought, 'Okay, we close down all the permanent workplaces, everybody is fragmented and isolated and atomized. But what the 'Support Committee' realized was that the same process had created this body of people who could move around as a flying picket all over the place, and they applied the strategy successfully in several small strikes.

SaNoShin: Isn't there a blacklist in France?

LG: A blacklist? I'm sure there is, why not? Why do you ask?

SaNoShin: In Korea, once you're on the blacklist you can't get a job anymore.

LG: Well, I'm sure something like that exists but I didn't hear about it. I mean there were some very strange kinds of developments. For example, I was actually involved when I was living in Paris that year, in one of their actions involving a small restaurant chain (Frog) that had four different restaurants. The striking workers were all from Sri Lanka. The strike began and the 'Support Committee' was working with them and the anarchists, the anarcho-syndicalist union was also working with them and after two or three months, it turned out that half of the strikers were the members of the Tamil Tigers. It caused huge problems in the strike. That's a long story, I'd be happy to tell it, but I don't think it's that important to what we're saying. Again, I don't think it's important but the Tamil Tigers were threatening assassination of some of the non-Tamil Tiger strikers. It was amazing. The owner of the restaurant chain was half English, half Indian, so he contacted the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, and he gave them some money and they ordered their striking members to pull out of the strike and also threatened violence against the non-Tamil Tigers who wanted to continue the strike. It was just unbelievable. This is way off the subject but there are about 20, 000 Sri Lankan workers living in Paris, and the Tamil Tigers police them like a secret government and they kill people who give them trouble. And the Islamic fundamentalists from Algeria try to do the same thing with North African workers living in France. But getting back to the union question, this group and there are some similar groups in Italy, attempting to develop new forms of class struggle that is not workplace-centered and not union-centered, with some success. But of course the biggest example is Argentina and the piqueteros, particularly in their early period when they also had a floating picket strategy that was not only picketing workplaces but hospitals, police stations, supermarkets, attacking supermarkets and so on. So these are all forms of struggle I can think that point to the possibility of a perspective beyond unions. Unless you have any more questions, I think we should go on to question no. 7.

SaNoShin: So the people who try to intervene in the workplaces, who carry out those kinds of strategies are mainly only the Trotskyists?

LG: Well, even Lutte Ouvri re has given up its exclusive workplace focus. And starting in about 1995, they tried, without much success, to have neighborhood committees around Paris and other cities where they had influence. The idea of finding people in bars and cafes and getting them involved in neighborhood struggles was an important step so even they had to recognize, with the casualization

and neo-liberal restructuring that their old exclusive focus on the workplace just wasn't enough. They weren't very successful. I don't think that has changed their focus on capturing unions where the unions still exists. They have also tried sending summer caravans of militants around France to try to contact people but as far as I know there have been no significant results.

(Back to the interview)

LG: If you're interested I want to say a couple of more things about little unions that have appeared in the last 15 or 20 years. In Spain, in France, in Italy, now in Germany, very small unions have formed outside of the classic union apparatuses and have started out with being more militant and more of a ..., they talk about themselves as class unionism. So for example in France, there's a small union, unfortunately I can't remember the name right now, but I will, and they are very locally based. They emerged out of the CFDT, the former "self-management", now very right-wing oriented union, I believe, initially in the post office and in the railroads. They conducted some militant strikes but they are very decentralized so some sections are militant and don't fall into the trap of union bureaucracy, but others do fall into this trap so there is some kind of an uneven character to them. So there are these attempts to break out of classical unions but as far as I know, none of them had any kind of clear cut success and I wouldn't expect them to have much now. But they are another factor to think about, in terms of answering the question of how communists should relate to union activity.

SaNoShinL SUD? (French name means Solidarite- Unite- Democratie)

LG: Yes, exactly. For example, in one of the strikes that the 'Support Committee' was deeply involved, it involved some African women who were working as cleaning ladies and maids in some luxury hotels. The women struck and they joined SUD and at first SUD was doing what they could to help them, but the strike lasted for 10 or 12 months. And after 2 or 3 months, it only involved 20 or 30 women, SUD decided that it wasn't worth the trouble and they walked away. After SUD walked away from the struggle the 'Support Committee' became the sole outside support of the striking women, and they used very creative tactics. For example, they would go to these luxury hotels on a Saturday night when there were hundreds of people coming there to these fancy restaurants for dinner and parties, and they would go right into the restaurants with loud speakers, distributing leaflets about the strike, and then in the lobby of the hotel, they would just sit down on the rug and have a picnic with wine, cheese, pate de foie gras and so on. Finally the management of the hotel just said, "Okay, it's only 20 or 30 women, we'll give them..." They got 50% pay for the entire 10 months they were on strike, they got all the other things that they asked for, and they only made one concession which was to not make public the terms of the settlement.

The reason I tell the story is that after this victory, SUD suddenly came back into the picture and they took a photograph of the women in the picket line holding signs and they published it in their magazine and wrote in "SUD" on their posters where the poster had nothing to do with SUD. So once again, like with the case of the Trotskyists in unions, it's important to realize that France is very special in a certain way and there's a kind of strike culture there that doesn't exist anywhere else that I know of. To give another interesting anecdote, at this restaurant strike, I was involved in a picket that was shutting down the restaurant and going inside with loud speakers, telling customers to leave, asking people not to come in, and then the police came. So the management of the restaurant had gone to the courts and they got a court order making the actions of the 'Support Committee' essentially illegal. The police came with the court order and there was this negotiation right at the door of the restaurant in which the policemen were saying, "Okay, let's see, you can go inside with loud speakers but you cannot block the entrance, you can...", they were going through all these specific things that the strikers could or could not do. That would just be unthinkable in America, the cops would just come and start swinging their sticks...

SaNoShin: Everything is illegal in Korea.

LG: Yeah, I know. In New York City a hundred police would come and they would just beat everybody and arrest everybody and that would be that.

And actually after many weeks, the police were coming every time there was a picket line, and they

were getting tired of coming because of the complaints of the management and I saw one situation where a woman was walking by and she said to the cop, "What's going on here?" And the cop grabbed one of the leaflets of the strikers and gave it to her and said, "Read this, this is what it's about!" Anyway, let's move on to question 7.

SaNoShin: What he initially wanted to ask you was: is there a revolutionary group which intervenes with these struggles?

LG: In general, as far as I know, I'm not aware of any. Maybe there is. The Aufheben group and some related comrades in Germany have also tried to intervene in a non-vanguard way. Actually this is another important thing to mention, people in France have generally become very suspicious of the way in which revolutionary groups have intervened in struggles in the past. After 1968 into the 70s, into the 80s, militants from Lutte Ouvri re or the LCR would appear in different struggles and they would say, "I'm from Lutte Ouvri re" or "I'm from the LCR.", and "We support your struggle." But people began to view this as a manipulative attempt to recruit to those organizations. I'm sure you had the experience here of militants from revolutionary groups who come to meetings, mass assemblies, and the discussion continues until 3 o'clock in the morning until only the members of those little groups are present and then they have a vote and they decide to pass some resolutions with the line of some revolutionary group.

SaNoShin: He says it's rare in Korea.

LG: Rare? Yeah, I mean some of these cadre organizations specialize in being able to last in a meeting longer than anybody else. So for example in San Francisco, in the US, a Trotskyist group became influential in a union of longshore workers, and it's a union with a long militant tradition in San Francisco and these Trotskyists became influential with these kinds of tactics. So one day, at 2 o'clock in the morning, they got a resolution passed in a union meeting, supporting the struggle of the Palestinians against Zionism, "We, the members of the local longshore union declare our full support for the Palestinian people against Zionist imperialism". In the next issue of the union newspaper, the ordinary members of the union learned about this for the first time. They didn't even know this was an issue in the union meeting. But the point I'm making is that in France for example, the major Trotskyist groups no longer appear in meetings presenting themselves as members of these Trotskyist groups. They merely say, "I'm from this factory." or "I'm from this office." or "this company" and I've seen them control meetings and pushing through the line of Lutte Ouvri re and most people in the meeting don't even know that they're members of Lutte Ouvri re. Somehow they're chairing the meeting, they're the coordinators of the meeting, but they do not have badges saying "Lutte Ouvri re", they just have badges saying "some union" or "some workplace" and they never mention their affiliation with these Trotskyist groups. The simple reason is that people are just tired of that kind of manipulation in the meetings.

Let's go on to the next question.

SaNoShin: It's a short question.

LG: Okay, question no. 7. Once again, as with the union question, it's not accurate to say that all left communists reject electoral activity because the Bordigists, the same way that they are for trade union participation, they also are for parliamentary elections in some circumstances. Because the Bordigists reject the idea of decadence so it's possible to do today what communist and socialists did in 1890. But anyway... for myself, I have to say I thought very little about this question because it has never been posed in any practical way in any situation that I've ever been involved in or that I know about in countries that I'm familiar with. I guess I could imagine with a much later development of a working class anti-capitalist movement, that under some circumstances, participation in some elections would be okay. But I think again the experience of Europe has shown since the 1960s that electoral participation really doesn't give very much. Lutte Ouvri re for example as you know, has had fairly successful presidential campaigns with 5% of the vote like the LCR, but there's a big gap between their actual base and their influence in workplaces and neighborhoods and the populist kind of rhetoric that they use in elections. The populism of Lutte Ouvri re's electoral campaign is sometimes quite

unbelievable. And it says very little of what one would expect revolutionaries to say. Their justification of electoral participation as education, to me, it's simply... They don't educate, and the amount of energy they put into it, I think, has very little benefit. You may know that just in the last month Lutte Ouvrière has announced that they will now form electoral alliances with the socialists and communists in local elections, which is something they have never done before. The country of course that I'm most familiar with, the United States, in the US the occasional electoral campaign of the Trotskyist groups have been totally meaningless. In the United States, only 50% of the population votes in the elections and that 50% is the wealthier half of the population so working class and poor people generally never vote. Therefore from a practical point of view, the question of electoral participation has never been a very important question for me. For example, I lived in a town where this university was where I worked on the non-academic staff, that had a left-wing city council. In this town there was a very powerful union of tenants. From 1970 to 1994, as a result of this union, this town had a very tough control on rents so that rents could only arise by 1% or 2% a year. The local politics in this town at the municipal level, were completely polarized around this question of the control on rents. I voted for the rent control candidates in the city council elections and I handed out leaflets for them but I never imagined that it had any importance as a revolutionary intervention or strategy. In some very specific situations, I can imagine supporting or participating in elections that have very concrete results, not connected to bourgeois political parties but I cannot imagine a situation in which that would be a common, important part of the revolutionary strategy. Maybe afterwards we can discuss if you disagree where you think that it could be important. I'm afraid that's all I have to say about the electoral question unless you have some other things you want to ask me about.

SaNoShin: No. 8, Do you think all the communist lefts reject the united front?

Okay, broadly speaking again, yes. But the Bordigists say they are for the "united front from below". I was talking to an Italian Bordigist in Italy a few years ago and he said "No, we are for the united front from below.", meaning in his mind that it was legitimate for revolutionaries to appeal to the rank and file of socialist and communist parties as an attempt to break the control of the leaderships of those parties. And frankly, it sounded to me very similar to a Trotskyist point of view (though I'm sure the Bordigists would disagree; the Trotskyists issue their united front calls to the leadership of the "reformist" parties to discredit them in the eyes of the rank- and- file.) I think first of all, as we were discussing last time, we talked about the origins of the German-Dutch and Italian left communist and I think it's important to look at the origins of the united front strategy in the Communist International, the 3rd and 4th congresses. As you know, Lenin wrote the pamphlet "Left-Wing Communism" against both German-Dutch and Italian left communists and their rejection of working in certain trade unions and also their refusal to participate in electoral politics and to generally accept the Comintern turn to the united front. Now, as I said last time, I think what was really important about the both German-Dutch and Italian left communists was their criticism of the idea that the Russian revolution could be a universal model. And this to them, in different ways, meant the question of allying with other classes. In the case of the German-Dutch council communists I think they just felt that from 1918 until 1921 or 1923, they were in a revolutionary situation and that parliamentary activity was not only a waste of time, it was simply reactionary. Now in the Italian case which was more subtle, the Bordigists felt that the Comintern order to make an united front with the left wing of the Italian Socialist Party was essentially an order to re-merge with the very same people that they had just split from 6 months or 12 months earlier, which included people who had been pro-war in 1914 and 1915. The Bordigists argued that the united front turn of 1921 was another part of a general turn to stabilization in western Europe and the world that we were talking about earlier with these other foreign policy questions, such as the Anglo-Russian trade agreement. So the united front turn of 1921 was part of this general shift to the right of the world situation and the falling away of the revolutionary potential in western Europe. By 1921, it was clear to most people that no revolution was going to be happening in western Europe in the immediate future. And I think the united front turn of the Comintern was an accommodation to that situation. The concrete reality as I said, not only in Italy

but in all countries meant taking into the communist parties, or allying with elements that had been pro-war in 1914 and who rejected the 21 conditions of the Comintern in 1919 or 1920, whenever it was. What the Bordigists particularly objected to in the Comintern strategy was the idea of united front turn as a strategy for conquering the masses. They felt that it was essentially a liquidation of their program and they argued that the important thing..., they recognized that the period of revolution was over as well, but they said the important thing was to retain the core revolutionary communist program and wait for the next wave of militant activity. Now one can say that this is a sectarian attitude and in fact I think we have to recall that the specific situation in Italy was one where Mussolini was going to seize power with a fascist regime one year later. So for example, I know many Italian anarchists and libertarian communists who think that this sectarian attitude of Bordiga contributed to the victory of Mussolini. We can discuss that but what I think is clear is that in all the communist parties by 1924, the elements that did enter the party through the united front, starting in 1921 became the base of Stalinism. There was this notorious case in France of Marcel Cachin, he had been a pro-war socialist in 1914, he entered the Communist Party through the united front strategy and he became the biggest Stalinist in France after 1924, and there were similar developments in Germany...

-ThÃ¶lmann?

ThÃ¶lmann, I don't know if ThÃ¶lmann was pro-war in 1914 but there were other people like him. So what I'm saying is maybe the Bordigists were being sectarian in immediate circumstances of Italy in 1921, in their attitude towards alliances with socialists but the fact to the matter was that through the whole movement, the united front strategy was the vehicle for the future Stalinists entering the movement. Similarly, the united front turn involved ordering the American communists to forget about the IWW and enter the the AF of L, the conservative trade union formation. You know the IWW?

SaNoShin: a revolutionary syndicalist organization.

LG: Yes, and in 1921 they still were powerful. And in Britain similarly, the Comintern ordered the British communists to enter the Labour Party and also work in the framework of the TUC, the trade union confederation. Now once again from an abstract point of view, maybe the Comintern theory was right. But the concrete results as with the people who joined the communist party were not good, and involved an accommodation of communist parties in different ways to their societies.

SaNoShin: I think the flaw was in the elements who joined the communist party after the united front. So isn't the problem in the people, the communist parties who practiced the united front in that way, not in the strategy itself?

LG: Could you give some concrete examples?

SaNoShin: So for example, at the British general strike in 1926 the activists in the Communist Party depended too much on the trade union bureaucrats and the Labour Party bureaucrats.

LG: Okay, I would say that is the result of the entry into the Labour party and the TUC, starting in 1921. There was a very powerful post-war revolutionary surge of workers in Britain in 1919, almost as important as the German revolution or the Italian factory occupations. At the end of the struggle, after the defeat of that movement, the Communist Party was already accommodating to the Labour party and to the trade unions. I have to confess I don't know a lot about Britain specifically but I would think that by 1926, their party was already probably quite Stalinized. I could be wrong. Did you want to mention some other concrete examples?

SaNoShin: Is it because the Communist Party became Stalinized, that they accommodated to the trade union bureaucrats and the Labour Party?

LG: Well, I would say that happened before they became Stalinists. And I'm not saying that that's the explanation of Stalinism but I am saying that the people who... after the very early years of the western European parties-1919, 1920, 1921-the people who replaced them in the reorientation of the Comintern became Stalinists.

SaNoShin: The united front defended the workers' living standard and it was to get more support from the mass of people. So do you think we have to generally reject it?

LG: I think if we look at that specific situation we see that the mass of people..., what the Bordigists

objected to in the united front strategy was the attempt to win mass popularity with something less than a revolutionary perspective, a revolutionary program. And I think we have to recognize that people who were attracted to the communists after the 1921 turn, generally brought elements into the party that laid the basis for Stalinization. In 1924, there was the so-called Bolshevization of the Comintern under Zinoviev which consolidated the Stalinist elements in the various western CPs. It's a very important and complicated question of how a communist organization should act and survive in a period when struggle is going down. So maybe in the abstract there is something positive about the Comintern united front turn, but in the concrete, at that time in every case I know of, the results were disastrous.

SaNoShin: What do you think about Trotskyist transitional program? I think it's based on the united front demand.

LG: Before I answer that and I will answer that, let me just say what I think is a very important point, which is that the united front question has remained important because of this characterization now, first of all by Trotskyists of the Social Democrats and Stalinists as workers' parties. They still call the French Socialist Party and the French Communist Party "workers' parties" and similarly in other countries. They call the German Social Democrats a workers' party. So starting in the 1970 with Chile, and then in the early 1980s with Spain and France... Chile was different because there was a small bourgeois party in the coalition, but in both France and Spain in 1981 and 1982, the Socialist Party, the so-called workers' party won absolute majorities in parliament and did not have to make any coalition with any kind of explicitly bourgeois party. So in those countries, different Trotskyists were saying "Down with the popular front!", practicing their understanding of the strategy of united front and the application of the transitional program because they believed that these-the Mitterrand government in France and the Gonzalez government in Spain-were workers' parties in power and they could be exposed by this kind of united front strategy. And these parties stayed in power for 15 years with absolutely no problem and the Trotskyist united front action was again, essentially meaningless. The idea of them being workers' parties and the meaning of the transitional program is to expose the gap between the rhetoric of the bureaucrats and the desires of the masses. But there was no contradiction. They said they wanted to administer capitalism, and they did. The Trotskyists' idea was that by pushing their version of the transitional program that they were driving a wedge between the bureaucratic "traitors" of the workers' parties and the workers. Their fundamental problem is that they always believe that they're living in 1917 and that they can do to the reformist so-called workers' party what the Bolsheviks did to Kerensky. The slogan of the LCR was something like "A 2nd ballot victory for a 3rd ballot social movement"-the idea that Mitterrand gets into power and then the real revolution can start. The reality was that of course, Mitterrand was in power for 14 years and some former members of the LCR became middle level officials of the Mitterrand government, just exactly in the same way that people from the "386" (the Korean left of the 1980's) generation here wound up in the Roh Moo-hyun government.

SaNoShin: The Korean Cliffites (Ta Hamke in Korean) think that Kwon Young-gil is the workers' presidential candidate and they always say if he is elected, Korean society will change very differently and he will bring a kind of progressive program in Korea. But in the past they supported Cho Soon and Kim Dae-jung (Note: the latter were bourgeois politicians of the 1990's transition to democracy).

LG: Well, the Mitterrand government could not have been as successful as it was without some of the Trotskyist cadre who left the little Trotskyist groups and became junior ministers and officials. There was just another anecdote, at some point Alain Krivine, the leader of the LCR, was at a small demonstration against some foreign policy move by the Mitterrand government and after many hours, finally the government said, "Okay, we'll send an official out to talk to you.", and the official came and it was a former member of the LCR who was now like the vice minister of foreign affairs. It's kind of like Jospin having been a former member of the OCI workers' party. So, of course, there are very orthodox Trotskyists who say, "This is all a lot of bullshit, of course these large groups like LCR have betrayed Trotskyism and we are the true Trotskyists". But reality is that the application of this

united front strategy in these post World War â...; situations, with the transitional program, has always been a farce.

SaNoShin: There are groups like Respect and Die Linke opposing to the social democrats, in problems like anti-globalization or the pensions, so what do you think about them?

LG: Okay, well first of all, Die Linke in Germany is largely a group of ex-Stalinists from the former eastern Germany with the party base of people in eastern Germany who look to them because of all the hardships that they suffered as results of national reunification. I just don't think they have gone beyond the Stalinists, they are no longer obviously a Stalinist party but probably something more like a left-wing social democratic party, and all the other parties-the Greens and the social democrats-want nothing to do with them because of their association with the former East Germany. But I don't see anything positive coming from Die Linke. And in the case of Respect, that's a front of the British IS group and they run Islamic fundamentalists in local elections. And generally they have this guy from Scotland who is a popular politician but once again I think there is no substance to it from any kind of a revolutionary point of view. (NOTE ADDED 1/30/08: Respect apparently expelled the SWP from their organization- a case of a front group expelling its creators.)

-George Galloway?

Yes, George Galloway who is a popular figure who they have attracted to Respect, but from what I hear from my friends in Britain he is just essentially a demagogue with very low political content but since he's popular they use him. But I want to point out that the IS does with Respect in Britain the same thing the Korean Cliffites do with the Korean Stalinists, that is they try to build them up into a powerful force from which they can recruit. But the question here, as in the earlier question about elections we were just talking about, is the old question, "Who is the horse, who is the rider?" It's a question of the meaning of alliances, who is benefiting from the alliance and who is doing the work. The the Korean Cliffites and the British SWP think that they are the rider and these groups are the horse. But in fact, I think it's clear that it's the other way around. (Note of March 2008: The expulsion of the SWP by Respect would seem to answer this question conclusively, and the Korean Cliffites' support for the NL candidates in the December 2007 presidential elections was a fiasco.) I don't know if this was a Respect demonstration but I'm pretty sure it was, in August 2006, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the war with Hezbollah, the British SWP and I believe Respect, organized an anti-war demonstration of about 15,000 people and the main chant of the demonstration was "We are all Hezbollah". That's pretty much what I have to say about these groups, I just don't think they are of any importance.

SaNoShin: Okay, but doesn't it show that the Labour party and the Social Democrats are declining? Isn't it a sign of them losing popularity?

LG: Yes, but I don't think their emergence in any way solves the problem of the decline of the older organizations.

SaNoShin: I agree.

LG: I mean, they're supporting Islamic fundamentalists, I think they have already deteriorated. There was a demonstration in Britain several years ago, I don't remember the issue but the British SWP played a very large role in it, I don't know if Respect was involved in it, and some Pakistani gays came to the demonstration with their signs. And the goon squad of the British SWP excluded them from the demonstration because they didn't want to upset the Pakistani Islamic groups that were participating in the demonstration. I'm sure they would say that what I just said is a sectarian attitude. So can we go back to question no. ...

SaNoShin: I think it's appropriate to end no. 8 and go on to question no. 9.

LG: Okay.

SaNoShin: It's question no. 9 on the paper, and you quoted Lenin's "What is to be done?", saying that on the title page of the first edition (Note: The quote disappeared from subsequent editions) Lenin quoted Lassalle, and you said it hints at purification.

LG: Yes, "the party purifies itself by purging itself". I think that was the quote. I think it's very

important that Lassalle was viewed as a precursor. At the 1924 congress of the Comintern, according to Max Eastman, there were three big pictures behind the speaker's stand-Marx, Engels and Lassalle. I think it shows how Lassalle was viewed that late as a revolutionary who had contributed to the development of the working class movement. In fact it was Lassalle, not Lenin, who was the first person to argue that the revolutionary party should be a special military party of professional revolutionaries. And because Lassalle was eliminated from the revolutionary pantheon, starting in the mid 1920s, his great influence on the Russian movement is not widely appreciated. After the 1924 congress, it was at that time when they discovered the documents that showed that Lassalle had been meeting secretly with Bismarck. Again I'm not sure about the dates there but it was after 1924 that Lassalle was forgotten. He went into the unmentionable file. But the important thing is that Lassalle played a very important role in the development of the Russian revolutionary tradition before the introduction of Marxism, and certainly before the appearance of Bolshevism. I don't think there is time to talk about every aspect of it now, but I think the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia had a very unusual evolution relative to the western European capitalist countries. Are you familiar with Nechaev?

SaNoShin: Yes.

LG: Nechaev in the 1870s wrote his "Revolutionary Catechism", and it said the revolutionary has no friends, the revolutionary has no romantic attachments, the revolutionary lives for only one thing which is the destruction of the existing world, and I'm sure I'm forgetting other things. And as you may know the Russian writer Dostoevskii wrote a very powerful novel called "The Devils" (or "The Possessed") which portrays this mentality of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia before Marxism, and before Bolshevism in which clandestine groups of revolutionary intellectuals are sitting around and saying, "Well of course we will have to kill millions of people to build the perfect world." So the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia repudiated Nechaev and Nechaev's specific activities. On the other hand, the mentality I think, pervaded the revolutionary milieu there.

SaNoShin: In Korea we had similar influence.

LG: Really? Like the NL faction?

So Victor Serge again, reports that in 1920, 1921, in the first congresses of the Comintern, when communist delegates came from other parts of the world, there was no one who compared to the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia in terms of experience and attitude. And I think we can all agree that Nechaev's "Revolutionary Catechism" has nothing to do with a Marxist view of the revolutionary individual. I think that in the creation of Bolshevism, was this influence of a very unique evolution of Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, the influence of Lassalle, not Marx and that even when the Russian revolutionary tradition was talking an exclusively Marxist language, this other element was always present. When Lenin wrote "What is to be done?", he argued that real class consciousness..., that the working class struggle, the spontaneous struggle of the working class could never go beyond trade union consciousness and that revolutionary consciousness was embodied in this special stratum of revolutionaries. It's like what I was saying earlier, that the Bolshevik party embodies the revolution, they were the revolution and people who criticized them were counter-revolutionaries. There was this dualism in Lenin's view between the reformist, trade unionist practice of the working class and the revolutionary perspective of the party and that without that special body of professionals, the working class would never go beyond trade union reformist practice. Then came 1905 and the creation of soviets and workers' councils and it was clear that, because the soviets and workers' councils were not created by Bolsheviks, that the whole view was wrong! I think it's really important and I presume you agree that the soviets and the workers' councils were not a discovery of any theoretician. They were the discovery of the practical activity of the working class. So when Lenin published "What is to be done?", Rosa Luxemburg was not the only critic of what he said. Trotsky, in two separate writings- the "Report of the Siberian Delegation" and also another one called "Our Political Tasks"-said.... Trotsky wrote the famous passage, "In Lenin's conception the party will substitute itself for the working class, the central committee will substitute itself for the party, and finally the general secretary will substitute

himself for the central committee.", 1904, Leon Trotsky. Similarly Rosa Luxemburg's criticism, summarized in the line, "The mistakes and lessons of a working class movement in motion are more important than the directives of the most intelligent central committee." She was pointing at the expression in "What is to be done?", of these elements that I think were unique to the Russian party organization and which we were talking about before, when we were talking about Kronstadt. with relationship to the origins of Kronstadt, this creation of this party apparatus that embodied the revolution above the practical movement of the working class. And as you know, in 1918, just before her death, she wrote her second criticism of Lenin, in which she said, "What we see in Soviet Russia today is indeed a dictatorship, but it is not the dictatorship of the proletariat." Now before I go any further it's important to point out that Rosa Luxemburg was also a centralist. She rejected Lenin and Lenin's centralism, but she did not reject centralism as such. For example, her writings on the national question are really quite remarkable, and in those writings she criticizes Lenin and the Bolsheviks for giving independence to Finland and Poland and Georgia, saying that they should not have accommodated the bourgeois nationalist movements in those countries. And I really recommend reading her writings on the national question. Have you read them?

SaNoShin: They're not translated in Korean.

LG: Oh, they are not translated? They're available in English.

SaNoShin: News pamphlet?

LG: They're available in Rosa Luxemburg. The National Question: Selected Writings. (Monthly Review Press 1976). Anyway, she studies many different countries and argues that in every case, decentralization was always attached to reaction. The people who present Rosa Luxemburg as a libertarian anti-centralist, are inventing a Rosa Luxemburg that didn't exist. In the party debates in German Social Democracy around 1910, she argued very strongly for the expulsion of certain people who she felt had violated party principles. Now on the other hand I think unfortunately Rosa Luxemburg died too soon to really develop her own independent views of what a communist party should be. As you know in the last year of her life, she was very skeptical about the founding of the Third International because she felt that prior to the development of independent communist parties in western Europe that it would inevitably be dominated by the Russian party, which of course it was. So many orthodox Leninists and Trotskyists criticize Rosa Luxemburg for not having acted sooner to form her own party independent of the Social Democrats. Rosa Luxemburg was also very friendly with the Dutch council communists prior to World War I, Pannekoek, Gorter and Roland Holst. They left the Dutch Social Democracy in 1908 and they asked Rosa "Why don't you do the same thing? It's obvious the SPD is lost to reformism.", and Rosa replied "The worst social democratic mass party is better than an irrelevant marginal sect." So I always ask orthodox Trotskyists and Leninists in discussing this question, when they say the German revolution failed because Rosa Luxemburg and people like her did not form a revolutionary party in time, is: why was there no revolutionary party? What is the concrete historical answer to that question? And when you ask them that they just say "um...", because they are forced to say that the German revolutionaries should have listened to Lenin. But it's important on that very question, to emphasize that Rosa Luxemburg had broken with Kautsky by 1910 and realized that he was a conservative element in the German Social Democracy in the Second International. In fact Rosa Luxemburg understood years before Lenin, that the center of the German Social Democracy was already rotten. In 1914, when Lenin received the newspapers from Germany announcing that the Social Democrats had voted for war credits, he thought that they were actually police provocations and that it was all a lie. So Lenin clearly had more illusions about German Social Democracy than Rosa Luxemburg. So the question of why Rosa Luxemburg and the left wing of the party did not break earlier, in my opinion, is a somewhat unhistorical question that goes back to the party fetishism of Leninism and Trotskyism. I think the Leninist, Trotskyist view is a kind of virgin birth view of where political parties come from. So what is my own view of the revolutionary party or revolutionary organization? And I do use the term 'party'.

SaNoShin: I think it was wrong for Rosa not to break from the party with the left wing.

LG: But when do you think she should have done that?

SaNoShin: At least during World War I .

LG: But they did. The left wing did constitute the USPD in 1915, 1916, but of course it was inadequate and so the communist party grew out of that .... I think history shows that workers' parties, revolutionary parties grow out of concrete situations just like the Bolshevik party grew out of a concrete situation and that it's at the moment of rupture that the possibility of the creation of new parties emerges. There had been previous oppositions in the German social democrats, the party youth organization in about 1891, broke with the party and said that it had become completely bourgeois but they were a small sect that disappeared very quickly. In my opinion the real failure of the left wing of the Social Democrats to break and become an independent party reflected the weight of reformism in the German working class and the fact that as was shown after 1918, there was only a minority that supported revolution. But I don't think there was any time prior to 1916, 1917, 1918, for that minority to actually break in a coherent way and not be a sect. Of course I could be wrong but getting back this question we talked about with Russia, there was a general overestimation that was widely held, of the revolutionary character of the German Social Democrats. I think that that weighed very heavily against any premature attempt to break away and create an independent party. Let's not forget that in no other important capitalist country, did any similar breakaway from the Second International or Social Democracy occur until after the war. With the victory of the Russian revolution and the way in which the Bolshevik model became the universal model, it created this kind of virgin birth illusion of the Leninist party as a discovery that should have been applied earlier in many countries. And it created this very unhistorical view of how parties arise, that it is kept alive today by orthodox Trotskyists and Leninists. It's important for example that in Marx's pamphlets on the Paris Commune, unlike modern Trotskyist writings, he does not end by saying "If only they had a revolutionary party!" I think that that whole way of thinking-it's something that was introduced to the workers' movement by Lenin and post Leninist-developments. I think for Marx and Engels there was an understanding that the class organizes the party, the party does not ..., of course the party organized the class but it's a product of the class, not vice versa. The weakness of the party in different countries reflects first of all, a weakness of the class. So in terms of my own view of a revolutionary party, do you want me to include that answer to no. 9?

SaNoShin: Yes, please.

LG: Okay, I obviously, from everything I said, I'm more sympathetic to Rosa Luxemburg's view than to Lenin's view but as I also said, because Rosa was killed in 1919, that there's no coherent party theory in her work. There's just certain kinds of observations from practice and her criticism of Bolshevism. The really fundamental thing that needs to be understood today is that a revolutionary organization has to incorporate a very deep understanding of the failures of Social Democracy and of Bolshevism. At the same time I also reject the anti-party attitude of later German-Dutch council communists. It's important to remember that in the early 1920s the German-Dutch council communists also argued for a revolutionary party. But by 1930 the ideology of councilism had kind of consolidated itself and that party element just disappeared. So if I say that today a revolutionary organization has to incorporate the failures, understanding the failures of Social Democracy and Bolshevism, what I mean is that there should be a clear understanding of the superiority of the experience of the class to the political organization. And what I mean by that is that the vanguard is the advanced stratum of militant workers plus conscious revolutionaries. But it's important to always remember that... I believe that conscious revolutionaries are necessary to the revolutionary process. They know something that the average or even militant worker doesn't know. Their intervention in struggles, of course, is to apply Marx's idea that the task of communists is to push forward the unification of the working class. And to use struggles to present a programmatic alternative to the existing society, but above all not to imagine struggles as the typical vanguard group does, mainly as means of recruitment to their organization. I said they should think of struggles as a situation in which to introduce a perspective beyond the specific struggle, beyond the existing society for an alternative

social project. They should recognize that the vanguard is the consolidated historical experience of the advanced part of the class and that it is not necessary for that to be embodied or crystallized in a formal organization. The revolutionary organization will grow into a mass organization in the months prior to the revolution. But between now and that time, it's important for the revolutionary organization to have a very clear roadmap of where it is and where the working class is in society. Because historical experience and particularly historical experience since 1968 teaches us that any organization that consolidates itself in the framework of capitalism, outside of a period of intense struggle, becomes part of capitalist society. The alternative which is pursued by the vanguard groups of the last 30 or 40 years is to imagine that they are crystallizing that experience in their organization. The alternative I'm criticizing is the view of vanguard groups that imagine that by building their organization they are crystallizing that advanced class consciousness, produced by moments of explosive struggles. And by doing that they become artificial organizations detached from the movement of the class and they become obstacles to the next phase of radicalization. The examples I would point to are the Trotskyist groups in France that we've been discussing, that have a strategy of infiltrating trade union organizations or the socialist and communist parties but actually do this by their success as militants, not because of any acceptance of their program. I think that kind of artificiality is the main danger that a revolutionary organization has to pay attention to in its development. Just to give a very modest example, I have not belonged to a revolutionary vanguard organization for more than 30 years. Nevertheless I participate in struggles where I can and try to interject my perspective where I can, I write articles and put them on my website, and they're published in journals around the world and people read them and agree with them or don't agree with them but I don't feel that anything is lost by the fact that I'm not recruiting them to my organization. Those things are out there in the movement as a whole. Of course I don't recommend my own individual experience as a view for a party organization but I think a party should have a similar attitude that its contribution is a contribution to the movement and it should not act superior to the movement. That is basically my view. In the big explosions of the 1960s and 1970s in the West, I can't think of any one of those explosions that was initiated by a vanguard political party. And that's perfectly normal. Lenin said the same thing in 1905 and earlier than 1905, "Yes, there's a mass strike wave, it wasn't started by us, but then at a certain point of course, political organization does become important." I forgot to mention earlier that after 1905 Lenin said "I was wrong. Clearly what I said in "What is to be done?" is not right because the constitution of soviets, workers' councils and dual power in Russia prove that the workers struggle goes beyond trade union consciousness without the intervention of a party." But it's unfortunate that having said that, Lenin didn't write another pamphlet called "What is not to be done?" to correct the problems of "What is to be done?". In the modern Bolshevik Leninist tradition there's a lot of mythology about exactly what the Bolshevik party was prior to 1917. It's important to remember that after 1905, or after the defeat of 1905, the Bolshevik party went into a huge downturn and had a very weak organization in Russia probably until about 1912. And it's even more important to recognize that when Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917, he found Stalin and Zinoviev and all the other main leaders supporting the Kerensky government. So Lenin of course was a brilliant political strategist, and as you know, in the April Theses and after that, he said to the ... The point I'm making is that the party apparatus itself expressed a completely inadequate understanding of the situation until Lenin and then later Trotsky introduced the perspective of the possibility of proletarian revolution then, in that year. The apparatus was conservative, these exceptional individuals were in an exceptional situation, were able to turn it around. Lenin's attitude when he issued the April Theses after his return... most people in the Bolshevik party thought he had gone crazy. And what Lenin said was "Look at what the working class is doing. The working class is a hundred times more radical than the party." Lenin recognized in the radicalization of the situation in Russia that the working class was heading for a confrontation with the Kerensky government. So for example I urge you to look at the writings of C.L.R. James who wrote a lot about this question and who believed that the task of revolutionaries after the Russian revolution is to observe and record the

actions of the working class. In other words, he completely repudiates Lenin's theory of the revolutionary organization. I disagree with James and on my website you'll find two articles about James and his views but I do think that James had an important insight in his idea that the strategic brilliance of Lenin was his attention to what the working class was doing and seeing the party as something that was responding to that, not creating. His important insight was the way in which Lenin pointed to what the working class was doing as a guide for party policy and his understanding that the task of the party was to articulate the dynamic of the class struggle. What I'm saying is that Lenin at his best was not a party fetishist like contemporary Leninists and Trotskyists. Unfortunately after 1917, in the situation that we talked about, many things happened that brought out the worst aspects of the Leninist party organization. Many years later in the 1930s, Victor Serge said "It's true that the virus of Stalinism was present in Leninism. But while saying that it's important to recognize that there were many other viruses that could have developed in another direction." Unless you have some more questions on this, I think we should stop on no. 9?

SaNoShin: Yes, we have some questions but I think we should wrap it up here for today. You said you don't approve of the model of Bolshevik party and you approve that we have to have a party, what's your opinion about the party?

LG: I think, once again, that the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia developed in a very unusual environment and that even though Lenin and Russian Marxists rejected the populist tradition that had developed in the 1870-80s, the culture of the intelligentsia was still very influenced by populism and that the intelligentsia was deeply shaped by the fact of being a very small minority in an overwhelmingly peasant society.

So, I think that Rosa Luxemburg's criticism was coming from the experience of the western European mass worker's movement which could not exist legally in Russia. Rosa Luxemburg never had a chance to really develop her own independent theory of organization, because she stayed in the German SPD until after the outbreak of world war I. and she rejected the invitation of the German Dutch ultra lefts who appealed to her to break with the SPD around 1909. My agreement with Rosa Luxemburg was in no way a rejection of centralism.

Rosa, as we said, said that the mistakes of a mass revolutionary movement in motion are more important than best directives of the wisest central committee. And since she was assassinated in January 1919, she had very little opportunity to influence the development of German communist party but it's important to remember that she was herself a very convinced centralist. She argued strongly for the expulsion of certain kinds of people who broke the party discipline of the German SPD, and in her writings on the national question she was even more of a centralist than Lenin. She criticized Lenin for giving independence to Poland, Finland and Georgia and some of the other nations within the tsar's empire.

The issue is not centralism as such, it's what kind of centralism.

Similarly the German Dutch left communists, the ultra lefts also were in favor of a revolutionary party. I think the most important thing to emphasize is the questioning by Rosa and by the German Dutch ultra lefts and the Bordigists of the universality of Russian model.

I think the Russian model was deeply influenced by the special history of the Russia intelligentsia and an overwhelmingly peasant society.

And I think that the western European critics of Bolshevism in the early phase were right that it was not a model to be applied to western Europe.

As you know Rosa was against the formation of 3rd international at that time it was created.

Because she felt that its creation at that time would definitely led to Russian domination of the Third international and of course it is exactly what happened.

The Third Meeting

SaNoShin: What is your concept of a party?

LG: As for my own conception of party, I think that a revolutionary party today has to seriously incorporate an understanding of the failure of Social Democracy and Bolshevism.

As we will see more in detail when we discuss the agrarian question in number 10, I think both of those party models were deeply influenced by societies with significant agrarian populations and an important agrarian social question.

SaNoShin: What does it mean to incorporate an understanding of the failures of the past?

LG: I think that the one of the fatal flaws of Bolshevism in particular was the identification of the revolution with the party. They think the party is the revolution, I think that the class is revolution. Of course the class needs a party.

I think the mistake that develops out of the Social Democratic and Bolshevik experience was a formal understanding of the historical role of party.

The existing groups today that still have a Leninist conception of the party view their activity as in and above all the growth of their party.

So the active intervention of revolutionaries in broader social struggles has the result for them of attracting people to their organization.

In my opinion, the vanguard is on one hand the conscious revolutionary elements but it is also the most militant stratum of the working class.

Which means that the historical consciousness that the party claims to embody is in fact located in the class as a whole.

If we take a recent example, the experience of the E-land strike here in the last six months involved many workers, both E-land strikers and from other parts of the working class.

And a very large number of workers understand the importance of E-land strike.

And whatever happens, whether the strike wins or loses, the understanding of the question of casual workers and their need for class-wide solidarity will remain.

It doesn't have to be formalized in a party.

History shows that organizations that form in the framework of capitalist society outside of a revolutionary situation become part of that society.

So, in my view the revolutionary party is basically the party that becomes a mass party in the final days before revolution.

Most of my experience of Bolshevik Leninist parties in America and in Europe has been what I said earlier, that they intervene and exist in order to recruit.

I think that the role of a revolutionary organization or a party should be to generalize that understanding of the development of class struggle and capitalism without focusing on its own growth of the party as the main goal.

The most important thing I am trying to stress is the idea of the formal character of Bolshevik Leninist parties outside of a revolutionary situation.

Many little vanguards in America and Europe run around basically saying we are the revolution and they understand the revolution as something that grows when they grow but in fact, history shows the revolutionary organization that is really not formal, is the one that forms from the advanced stratum of workers in the final moments before the revolution.

I think a lot of people who have watched that formal character of vanguard parties have drawn the wrong conclusion from that experience and they are anti-party or they think that the party is of no significance.

That is not my opinion. I think that the conscious elements intervene in situations like the E-land strike and try to push it in the way that Marx said in the Manifesto, the task of communists is always to unify the working class.

It's important to notice that in the Manifesto he did not say, "Unify the working class in the communist party."

If you read typical Bolshevik-Leninist or Trotskyist articles today, when they're talking about some kind of struggle, they always end with a paragraph saying "If only the workers had a revolutionary vanguard party, the struggle would have gone differently." And of course by revolutionary vanguard parties, they mean themselves.

If you read Marx's writings or Engels's writings about 1848, or the Paris Commune, you do not find those kinds of remarks in their articles.

And I think it's very important to understand why they wrote that way and later in the 20th century people influenced by Bolshevism wrote the way I just said.

If you want to ask me some more questions, I mean that is my idea of the party that conscious revolutionary elements who intervene, try to expand the struggle to unify the working class, or who understand that real class consciousness is embodied in the experience of the most militant part of the class.

The most important thing for a revolutionary organization to have is, what I would call a good historical road map. To have an absolutely realistic understanding of where they are, and where the class struggle is, and where they are in relationship to the class struggle.

Because when that road map is absent or when the road map is wrong, that's what leads to the inflation of the view of the party as this true embodiment of the revolution.

SaNoShin: Generally we agree, that the party grows only under mass revolutionary struggles but nevertheless shouldn't we try to gain influence from the mass and try to form a base within the mass until then? But for example when ICC said that they only intervene when there are workers' struggles, it sounded quite passive. What do you think?

LG: Before I answer that question, what is not passive when there is no struggle going on?

SaNoShin: For example ICC was saying they would go to these big, mass struggles like the CPE struggle in France and make speeches and sell their articles. It sounded like their activity was just that. But there would be struggles in the factory or workplace in usual life too, so shouldn't we intervene? Big, mass struggles like the CPE struggle comes only once in a several years, so it seemed like a passive attitude.

LG: Okay, let me start by saying something about the ICC. The ICC is a good example of an organization that doesn't have a good road map. Back in the 1980s, the ICC had a whole vision of cycles of revolutionary class struggles building up... I don't remember the exact dates but they thought that the mid 1980s was a period of very intense class struggle, at least in western Europe and United States. When in fact it was a period of tremendous working class defeat.

Former members of the ICC have told me about being sent to some city in France or Belgium with huge bundles of newspapers and arriving at a scene and absolutely nobody was there.

To take again a very modest counter-example, my own experience, I have not belonged to any revolutionary organization for about 30 years. But I have been able to involve myself in struggles where I could, write articles that through the Internet circulate all over the world, travel and meet people like you and generally have an influence as one individual, you know, something doesn't have to be formalized in an organization. It's out there in the movement.

Well, of course I would like to be in an organization and in an organization with a serious road map, where involvement in the daily life situations and struggles of working people would be a possibility. But it should always be done with a very clear understanding of the very limited character of everyday life situations compared to the kinds of big struggles that erupts periodically.

To use a certain kind of metaphor many of the organizations that exist today are kind of like when a huge wave hits the beach and it leaves driftwood on the beach. And many 'formal organizations' are that driftwood.

The BordigIsts, I think are the best example of an organization that 80 years ago was important and a mass movement and today represents driftwood on the beach from an earlier tsunami.

In the same way, when we look towards the future, I think we should think of ordinary daily life as kind of that beach before the next tidal wave hits. That is what I mean by road map and the ability to keep things in proportion.

As you know from recent Korean history, things can go from being normal and quiet in one day to the most large-scale mobilization.

SaNoShin: So if we have the wrong road map, it's basically of no use?

LG: Well, first of all they wear out their members in mobilizations that do not connect to anything real in the class. And at the same time, my sense of their intervention in big struggle situations is probably... those are situations in which any number of groups can get a hearing.

We should never forget that in November 1918, when the German revolution broke out, that a million people gathered in downtown Berlin and at one end of the square, Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht were calling for the formation of the Soviet Republic of Germany and at the other end of the square the Social Democrats were calling for the creation of the German Republic and the crowd was cheering loudly at both ends of the square.

It was a situation which there was such great enthusiasm that ordinary workers were not making a distinction between the Social Democrats at one end and Communists at the other end.

I was not in Paris during the struggle against the employment law but I would guess that in many of the assemblies the interest in the ICC was not different from the interest that could be held by a good speaker from one of the Trotskyist groups that would have been in the same assemblies. I should be careful to say that because I wasn't there but that's my suspicion.

Now, if we consider a group like Lutte Ouvrière which has had factory committees with newsletters for 40 years or more and more recently has attempted neighborhood committees and summer caravans and so on... we get a certain framework, that kind of activity can of course be useful but I think it's always important to keep in mind that the pressure of daily life capitalism always carries the risk of exaggerating the importance of that kind of activity.

SaNoShin: I've got a question. I agree that the party's goal should not be recruiting people but to unify the working class. But what I don't understand is, so do you mean that we need a party only in the revolutionary period or do we also need them in a usual phase? And if we need them in the usual phase what would be its role or form? What you said sounds like we need the party only during the revolutionary period.)

LG: Okay, maybe the word 'party' is not the right word to use for the early phase of the formation of the organization. Many small groups do have a good road map, call themselves things like regroupment or pre-party formation or something along those lines. And they understand very clearly that their role at this time and recent decades has been to have discussions, put out literature, attract people, sometimes on an individual basis, sometimes in small groups, and again, more important than building their organization, developing networks of discussion and where it is possible, intervention.

SaNoShin: There's one more question. The traditional activities of Korea's socialist groups includes sending people into the factories so that they can fight and agitate in the workplace. But the ICC thinks of it as substitutionism and doesn't understand it. So what do you think?

LG: Well, I'm glad the ICC says that because I think in many cases that is what happens. In the experiences I'm familiar with in the US and Europe and a little bit of what I know about the student-originated movement of the 1980s in Korea, middle class people going into the factories is often very important for them but as for the possibilities of being a real contribution to the development of the working class, I think are limited and they're often non-existent.

I think the revolutionary organization that cannot attract working class people, including factory workers in the working class, again, has the difficult problem of lacking an adequate understanding of its own real place. And it can't solve that problem by things like sending its members into the factories.

SaNoShin: Another question is about professional revolutionaries. For example the ICC comrades said they don't use that term because they are all workers. What is your idea of a professional revolutionary?

LG: I have to say I think that is a generally healthy attitude. Part of the legacy that comes from Lenin and from "What is to be done?" is the idea of professional revolutionaries as the bearers of revolutionary consciousness as the embodiment of the revolution. And to see that the ICC is trying to get away from that, I think it's a good thing. I question whether that's truly their honest view but if they say so, that's good.

SaNoShin: Then what is the difference between professional revolutionaries and the conscious elements you mentioned before?

LG: I would think that those would be people like ourselves who have an understanding of the need for preparation for a revolutionary process with a modest road map of their own place in that process and... Well, I would say the conscious elements include the most combative and militant workers as well as the people who are, maybe as individuals and maybe as small groups, involved in this regroupment process that converges towards the revolutionary situation.

I know some very committed militants primarily in America who are of the Bolshevik Leninist tendency and they're very serious people and I'm sure one day they'll be part of the revolution. But when I question them about the relationship of the party and class, it's very interesting, for example, to ask them "Well, do you think the Russian revolution would have happened without Lenin?" Because as I said few minutes ago, they write newspapers and other articles that always end with a paragraph about how a revolutionary party is necessary if the situations are to be improved, and when I ask them "Why isn't there a party?", "Why hasn't history made people aware of the need for a party of the kind you advocate?" And they have no answer to that.

So when I ask them "Would the Russian revolution happened if Lenin hasn't been there?" and they say "Oh, of course not". And I say "So isn't that kind of pathetic, doesn't that point to the weakness of this huge social process that it all depended on one guy?"

Question 10: SaNoShin: In your article on the USSR problems, as you quote Bordiga, you argue that the transition to capitalism is that same as the agrarian revolution or agricultural capitalization. In my view, It seems that you regard the transition to capitalism as the elimination of non-capitalist productive relations or petty bourgeois sections. But you did not explain about it in detail. You just mentioned that Stalin had carried out agriculture collectivization policy consciously and bloodily. Explain it in detail and your opinion about Brenner's theory that describes the transformation to capitalism in agriculture as struggles between landlords and peasants.

LG: Bordiga, as you know, developed the idea of the Russian revolution as a DUAL revolution, a revolution that was made by an alliance of the working class and the peasantry. I think that anybody who studies the history of the revolution from 1917 to 1921, has to realize that the Bolshevik state managed to survive first of all because it was supported by the mass of peasants.

The Whites were incapable of including any kind of land reform in their program. And as a result the mass of peasants responded to the Bolshevik program of land distribution even though they didn't like the Bolsheviks and they didn't like the food requisitions during the civil war.

Most of the histories of the Russian revolution that are written from a Bolshevik, even broadly Marxist point of view, focus very much on relationship between the parties and the working class in the big industrial cities.

But I think that it's absolutely clear that what happened in Russia cannot be understood without a major focus on what happened on the countryside from 1917 up to the collectivizations of the late 20s and early 30s.

As we discussed the last time in one of the other questions, at the end of the civil war the Russian working class had almost disappeared and returned to the land to survive.

And obviously the focus of the NEP in 1921 was first of all aimed at the revival of the agriculture. And the crucial question in the industrialization debate from 1924 to 1928, between the left (Trotsky) and the right (Bukharin) and the so-called center Stalin, was around how to industrialize the country by accelerating primitive accumulation from the peasantry.

When I say that Stalin was in the center of course I'm only using the framework that was developed at that time because in fact as we know Stalin of the three factions was the most dangerous and counter-revolutionary of all of them.

The Bukharinist right was telling the peasants to get rich and use basically a capitalist market to do so.

The Trotskyist left, influenced by the economics of Preobrazhensky, was saying we have to have an organized voluntary collectivization but at the same time we have to exploit the surplus from the peasants in order to build up industry.

And Stalin only deserves the name of the center because he was setting both factions against each other and of course ultimately stole most of the left's program.

One of the terrible conceptual weaknesses of Trotskyism is its characterization of Stalin as a center in that period.

If the Bukharinist right had actually won the faction fight, would that have done more damage to the international revolutionary movement than Stalin did over the next 30 years?

But the Trotskyists always say "Oh, if Bukharin had won, capitalism would have been restored in the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik party would have been overthrown."

Maybe that's true, but would that have weighed more heavily on world counter revolution than the role of Stalinist Soviet Union from the 20s to the 50s?

It's also important to remember that Bukharin had some real insights about the flaws of the left opposition policy. He said around 1928 that if the left's program were actually implemented, it would require the hugest bureaucracy in history. And of course that's exactly what happened.

So for the reasons that I have just been talking about, we see that the agrarian question was absolutely central in the defeat of the Russian revolution.

Bordiga said that 1917 was a DUAL revolution in which the working class realized the goals of the bourgeois revolution, mainly 'land to the peasants'.

And once the working class dimension of the revolution was destroyed, what was left was the bourgeois revolution which was never undone.

Let's get back to the question of the discussion between Lenin and the western European left communists in 1919-1921, where they were saying "You, in Russia could ally with the peasants. We, in western Europe cannot ally with the peasants because they already have land and the bourgeois revolution is already accomplished."

SaNoShin: Now to get into the question about Brenner's theory and the agrarian question in a broader framework, which is the second part of this question-What is your opinion about Brenner's theory that describes the transformation to capitalism in agriculture as struggles between landlords and peasants. I'll come back to other modern movements but I want to talk about this now.

LG: One thing that I found very striking in studying the history of capitalism was the way in which a map of 17th century agrarian revolution corresponds almost perfectly to a map of the large communist parties in the 20th century.

And where the agrarian question was solved in a capitalist way by the middle of the 17th century, mass communist parties did not develop in the 20th century. That would be in England, Switzerland, Holland and of course later, the United States.

So, what's the connection? The countries that had not had a bourgeois revolution in agriculture developed the mercantile state starting in the second half of the 17th century.

France and England at that time were the two major rivals in early capitalism. England had its bourgeois revolution from 1640 to 1688, and France, which was much more backward in agriculture, developed this Colbertist mercantile state as a counterweight to English influence.

And what the mercantile state meant in France from the time of Colbert and Louis XIV until the French revolution was taxation of the peasantry, which was the introduction of commodity relations into the countryside.

There was an intensification of commodity relations in the countryside, and in some ways you can see Colbert's program of the 1650s and 60s as an early form of the kind of program that the Soviet economy carried out on the peasants in the 1920s.

The productivity of English agriculture in the second half of the 17th century was far higher than France's because the capitalist revolution had already happened there.

And the French mercantile state was copied by every other country that had the same problem of backward agriculture. And that includes Spain, Portugal, the small monarchies in the Italian peninsular, Prussia and other German states, Sweden, and finally Russia itself.

So when you take the map of this 17th century mercantilism and the major countries involved in it, it's quite surprising to see that those are exactly the countries where the communist parties became mass parties in the 20th century.

What is the connection? The connection is that those were countries that still in the early 20th century had a very large population of agrarian petty producers who had still not been transformed into workers.

England again, was 50% urban by the middle of the 17th century. And in continental Europe the same process of recruitment of labor from the countryside had to be carried out by the top down by the state.

Before the communist parties, there were mass social democratic parties which reflected the same problem in late 19th century European countries. They said "We are socialist and we are parties of the working class" but in reality they were statist and their true program was the modernization of the society and above all modernization of agriculture.

I would say again, getting back to the question of party and organization that we can understand the failure of social democracy and Bolshevism by the fact that they were parties whose true social program involved the modernization of capitalism in their country and above all agriculture and that this is absolutely not a problem today in advanced capitalist countries.

So we can connect these different historical threads by saying that Stalinism was an extreme form of 20th century Colbertism.

Now as for Brenner. I'm not a specialist in the history of the 14th to the 17th century but Brenner's theory to me is very attractive. The basic idea is that following the great plagues of the middle 14th century that a labor shortage had developed in the English countryside and greatly strengthened the position of agrarian workers, the agrarian workers who were still alive.

And so not just England but many western European countries in the second half of the 14th century were characterized by major peasant uprisings.

But in England they were particularly successful in destroying feudalism and forcing the introduction of commodity wage labor production in the countryside.

Not only did they bring about the creation of a wage labor proletariat in the countryside long before anywhere else but they forced English farmers as capitalists to introduce productive innovations that resulted in the most productive agriculture in the world at that time.

Brenner's theory is of course very hotly debated by historians. But what I like about his theory is his introduction of, a instead of seeing capitalism as a mechanistic force that sort of conquers the society that it's actually the result of the struggle between classes.

Unless you have any more questions that is basically what I have to say about question no. 10.

SaNoShin: In all Europe the only country that had that kind of agrarian revolution is England. So what do you think about the fact that in England there wasn't any proper revolutionary party? What is the reason?)

LG: My theory is that those mass parties succeeded in countries where the agrarian question and this large agrarian population was still a major social question. France, Spain, Germany etc. Whereas in England which was highly urban and had long ago had a full capitalist transformation of agriculture, that was not on the agenda.

The English working class did have a series of radical explosions both before and after World War I. From 1908 to 1914 was a whole series of syndicalist strikes in England and in Scotland and in Ireland and many English capitalists thought the game was over, that the revolution was there.

And then right in the last year or two of World War I and up into 1919, a further mass strike wave occurred throughout Great Britain.

To the point that as you may know Lloyd George, who was the prime minister in 1919, met with the head of the Trade Union Council and said "If you people want power, it's yours." They were ready to give up!

The bourgeoisie understood the power of the working class better than the working class did in that particular moment.

But nevertheless the Communist Party that formed in Britain in 1919/1920, by the early 20s was a relatively small sect that was ordered by Lenin and the Comintern to enter the British Labour Party.

And the question then, is why was the British Labour Party able to become the mass party when the Communist Party failed?

And I would say the answer to that is in the long earlier history of English economic development and political development which had made possible a broad parliamentary activity long before World War I.

It's important to remember that the Labour Party itself only was founded in 1906 and it came out of the mass Liberal Party which workers have been voting for right up to that time.

And unlike the German Social Democrats the British Labour Party never claimed to be a revolutionary party of any kind.

So the question that would be asked by people of the Bolshevik Leninist persuasion, why didn't this minority of the revolutionaries organize a revolutionary party, to me is a completely unhistorical question.

The same thing can be said about the United States even more dramatically. From the 1870s until the end of World War I, the United States had the bloodiest labor history of any advanced capitalist country.

The history of the American working class from the 1870s until after World War I was a story of private armies formed by the capitalists to crush strikes as well as the use of state militias and very bloody battles to crush strikes.

But nevertheless at the same time, the advanced capitalist economic nature of the US and the modern political process made it possible for the Republican and the Democratic Parties to attract working class support throughout this period.

What I'm saying is that social democracy and communism were very clear reflections of the relatively backward social character of those countries in which they became mass parties. And more advanced countries did not develop such parties.

SaNoShin: We are finished with the questions here, but we would like to add more questions about what we talked about earlier.

The socialists in South Korea, including us, usually consider themselves as Leninists. And there are some groups accepting the Trotskyist tendencies. So as your last comment, what are your overall thoughts about Leninism and Trotskyism?)

LG: I recommend to you reading the writings of CLR James, and I mentioned that I have two articles on my website that might interest you about him. And CLR James had a very interesting view of Lenin. He thought that Lenin was an adequate theoretician for the revolution prior to 1917 but that after 1917 a new period had developed in which the Leninist model was not only not necessary, it was wrong and reactionary.

As for myself, as you would see if you read the articles, I think James has a rather idealized view of Lenin prior to 1917.

But nevertheless, the most powerful part of this analysis is his criticism of the Trotskyists who think that the Leninist model is still the revolutionary model.

What James said, and I think this is absolutely true, is that the Trotskyists apply the best of the old Leninist model in new conditions in which that model is no longer valid.

James's idea, which again I think is quite important, is that the kinds of things that workers learned from social democrats, and above all from the Bolsheviks, they now learn from the overall organization of the society.

What James meant by that was that the defeat of the Russian revolution had resulted in state capitalism which he saw as a world tendency after 1917. In contrast to before World War I in which democratic liberalism was dominant only in a few countries and other countries were sort of developing in that direction.

The Stalinist model of social organization was something that nobody in 1900 could imagine or could have ever thought of.

So James felt that Stalinism was an extreme form of state capitalism which also existed in Nazi Germany and in Roosevelt's America, and which was organizing society in a actually totalitarian way.

And so he felt that the state regimentation of society taught the working class the same things that they had previously learned from the Social Democratic and Bolshevik parties.

The socialist parties were spreading a doctrine of state organization of society that was a minority view at the time when liberalism or pre-capitalist forms were dominant everywhere. But then by the middle of the 20th century where state capitalism was organizing all of social life there was an immediate and total politicization of all social life.

And James pointed to the Hungarian revolution as one example of where that knowledge of society from the Stalinist experience resulted in the immediate creation of workers' councils with no political party.

Whatever else you want to say about it, the Hungarian revolution was a revolution in which the working class took power with no vanguard party.

Of course they held power for a total of 12 days before they were crushed by the Soviet invasion but James nevertheless thought it was a fundamental proof of his theory that the working class no longer needed the Leninist vanguard.

He wrote a quite remarkable book in 1958 called Facing Reality which is very influenced by the Hungarian revolution.

In that book he said "Some day the French working class will move and it will leave the communist party hanging in the air." And that is exactly what happened 10 years later in May 1968.

In my own view, as you can see in what I said about revolutionary organizations, I think James goes too far in arguing against the need for an organization of revolutionaries.

But nevertheless I would say that James's analysis influenced my own view of the modest role of revolutionary organizations and the great importance of seeing the activity of the class as the most important part of the vanguard.

We talked about this in other questions but let me just repeat that the Bolshevik organization in Russia from 1906 to 1911 collapsed into almost nothing. And even though it had recovered by 1917 when Lenin returned to Russia as you know he found the entire leadership of the party supporting Kerensky.

So when Lenin announced the April thesis and called on the party to prepare for a proletarian revolution the great majority of Bolsheviks thought he was crazy.

And what Lenin replied was "Look at what the working class is doing. Look at how it is a hundred times more radical than the party and it is on the road to a revolutionary confrontation with the bourgeois government."

From that experience James argued that the task of the revolutionary party was to observe and record what the working class was doing and that was its true role. It had nothing independent of that to bring to the working class.

And I simply don't agree with that. I think that outside of a revolutionary situation, conscious revolutionaries do know something that the working class as a whole doesn't know and that they should be saying it in an active way.

I'll just finish by saying I think James's analysis does have the great merit of showing how the Bolshevik model developed in a very different social situation from anything that we confront in the advanced capitalist world today.

And the Trotskyists have no understanding of that. They're still living in 1917, preparing to confront the Kerensky government.

SaNoShin: We should have asked this earlier at first, but anyway, because we only know the ICC and IP, what other groups are there in left communism and what are their activities?

I would say there is a very broad range of ... If we define left communism as Marxism that situates itself to the left of Trotskyism I would say there is a broad milieu in the world, above all in Europe, small groups and individuals who could be called left communist.

In Italy for example, I think right now there are 6 Bordigaist organizations, each of them with about 20 members.

They act in Italy the way the Trotskyists do in many other countries. Every time they meet for a unity conference they have another split.

And of course the influence of Bordiga in Italy, and France, goes way beyond any organization. His writings are widely distributed and read, and Bordigist ideas are in the air.

It's important to understand that in the general reaction against vanguardism, Bolshevism, Trotskyism, there's also a relatively large milieu in England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain in which people call themselves anarchist, libertarian communist, anarcho-communist and other combinations that I think could be fairly seen as part of a broadly left communist mood.

I don't want to stretch the parallel too far but in America in early 60s as the New Left movement was beginning there was a wide spread hostility to Marxism and in the course of 6-8 years, these kinds of libertarian rejections of Marxism went into decline and people became more and more attracted to different kinds of Marxism.

And I believe something similar is happening today. There's a real Marxist renaissance going on in western Europe and the US and many people that I'm familiar with have started out as anarchists, and Situationists and they relatively quickly find their way to the study of Capital and the serious study of the failures of the old revolutionary movement and become left communist or close to left communist.

Anarchism, for example, is really not very interesting as a theory of contemporary capitalist society and people who are attracted to it because it rejects Soviet Marxist or Maoist models, very quickly get bored with it and that's when they begin to discover the richer Marxist alternative.

If you're not familiar, I really recommend this website which is a website of... It's called libcom.org -libertarian communist. They have really interesting coverage of struggles all over the world. There is one place you can see a lot of these. They even allow the ICC to participate in their debates but everybody just kind of laughs at the ICC.

SaNoShin: Are there any tendencies that call themselves Bolshevik but not Stalinist?

LG: Oh, absolutely.

SaNoShin: But not Trotskyist.

LG: Not Trotskyist, not Stalinist, but Leninist?

I don't know because almost all people who understand that there's an important difference between Lenin and Stalin become Trotskyists. And I'm not aware... well actually CLR James and his people, of course James died 15 years ago and there is no James organization but they definitely call themselves Leninist, and they're not Trotskyist and they're not Stalinist. And do you know Raya Dunayevskaya?

SaNoShin: Heard her name before, yes.

LG: News and Letters, that is another group that consider itself Leninist and not Stalinist and not Trotskyist even though they emerge from Trotskyism. Actually the most interesting revolutionary theories of the second half of the 20th century are almost all by ex-Trotskyists and that includes James, Guy Debord who was the theoretician of the Situationists who wrote some very good stuff in the 1960s, Castoriadis was a former Trotskyist, Socialism or Barbarism was a group he founded in 1947, and in America Max Shachtman and the Shachtmanites broke with Trotsky over the nature of the Soviet Union and I think you could argue that at least for some period of time they were revolutionaries as well. So it seems as if Trotskyism is the school for further phase of revolutionary theory in many cases.